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PC / PLAYSTATION / XBOX / NINTENDO / HARDWARE / LIFESTYLE



14 REVIEWS INCLUDING

Sunset Overdrive

Civilization:

Beyond Earth

The Evil Within

Call of Duty:

Advanced Warfare

HO HO HO

What'd you kall me? Oh wait, that's our ten page holiday gift guide!

OVERCLOCKING DOUBLE FEATURE

We travel the globe in search of the fastest klock speeds



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SQUEEZE THE HEART
OF MORTAL KOMBAT X

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If your DVD is missing then blame the ninja dude in the yellow mask. We just saw him uppercut the poor thing into that spikey pit below. Watch where you step down there!







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 XBOX ONE



14.1

WWW.ASSASSIN



The background of the cover art depicts a stylized Los Angeles cityscape at sunset. A large palm tree is on the left. In the center, a street intersection features a traffic light and a blue mailbox. Buildings with 'Tsunami' signs and a 'Garage' sign are visible. Two cars, a black one and a white one, are on the street. The sky is a gradient of orange and yellow.

grand theft auto

OUT NOW



ΔOX□

**EXCLUSIVE
FEATURE**

KEYS TO KYRAT:
Play co-op mode
with friends who
don't own the game

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CONTENTS



REGULARS

- 10 Ed's Note
- 12 Inbox
- 16 Bytes
- 30 home_coded
- 88 Mosh Pit: The Essential NAG
Holiday Gift Guide for Gamers



OPINION

- 16 Pixel Fix
- 18 The Game Stalker
- 62 Hardwired
- 98 Game Over



REVIEWS

- 40 Reviews: Introduction
- 40 Mini review: Metro Redux
- 41 Mini review: Legend of Grimrock 2
- 42 Sunset Overdrive
- 44 The Evil Within
- 46 Sid Meier's Civilization:
Beyond Earth
- 48 Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare
- 52 Halo: The Master Chief Collection
- 54 FIFA 15
- 56 Bayonetta 2
- 58 Dungeon of the Endless
- 59 Monsters and Medicine /
Transmission
- 60 Spacebase DF-9 / Monster Strike



HARDWARE

- 63 Dream Machine
- 64 Versus: Noctua NH-D15 vs. Cooler
Master Nepton 240M
- 68 MSI GS60 2QE Ghost Pro
3K Gold Edition
- 70 ASUS X99-A
- 72 Corsair Dominator Platinum
DDR4 3,200MHz 16GB
- 73 Astraphobe Lightning
Protection System
- 74 GIGABYTE GTX 980 G1 Gaming
- 76 Mionix NASH 20 headphones /
Piko
- 77 Mionix NAOS 7000
- 78 Lazy Gamer's Guide:
CloudGate Android PC
- 80 Lazy Gamer's Guide: Disney
Infinity 2.0 Marvel Super Heroes
Starter Pack

FEATURES

34 MORTAL KOMBAT X

Just when you thought *Mortal Kombat* couldn't get any bloodier, this happens. *Mortal Kombat X* is gearing up to deliver a brutal X-Ray Move directly to its predecessor's face by being stronger, faster and better in every way.

82 NAG EXTREME OVERCLOCKING AT RAGE 2014

At this year's rAge expo, resident hardware guru Neo Sibeko was ready and waiting with a giant can of liquid nitrogen to showcase the joys of overclocking, otherwise known as "fun with science".

84 NAG AT MSI'S MASTER OVERCLOCKING ARENA 2014

MSI's Master Overclocking Arena – the hardware giant's annual exhibition of competitive overclocking – was on fine form this year. We've brought all the details.

88 MOSH PIT: THE ESSENTIAL NAG HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE FOR GAMERS

Just in case you can't decide what gifts would best satiate the nerdy wishes of your loved ones, we've conveniently assembled a collection of the best of the best geeky Christmas gifts.

ON THE DVD



DEMOS

Betrayer / Blinding Dark / CO-OP Decrypted
Drifting Lands / Fenix Rage / Schein
War on Folvos / Woolfe - The Red Hood
Diaries



DRIVERS

All the ones you have are still valid



EXTRAS

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VIDEOS

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Chaos theory

► This year I discovered that I'm not as fussy as I thought I was. I've always been an incredibly picky eater and doer of things in general, sticking to my guns sometimes to spite myself.

But very often things come along that push and poke at the bits that we usually don't like having pushed and poked, and sometimes, that's not such a bad thing. As a species I think we tend to get too set in our way without really looking at why we are how we are.

One such gift of chaos was the recent release of *CoD: Advanced Warfare*. Most of us at Castle NAG are unashamedly quite into *CoD* – it's our guilty pleasure – but I've always thought that the single-player campaigns were, for the most part, a waste of time. If I'm not noob-tubing for justice in an online game then what's the point? Every time I tried the SP campaigns I found them moderately amusing but unsatisfying non-games. Harsh, sure, but I'm trying to paint a picture. Imagine my shock, awe and surprise when I discovered that *Advanced Warfare's* campaign is actually quite good. It snuck up on me: I was doing my usual bitching about it one day and then

a turning point came and I found myself completely giving in to its ludicrous but undeniably engrossing missions.

I'm not saying that I'm a convert – one good campaign this late in the series doesn't change history – but this has shown me that if a series as polarising and concrete-set as *CoD* can change, even as slightly as it has, then there's hope. Or maybe it's exactly the same. Maybe I'm the one who's changed. Woah.

Speaking of change, you better scrounge together your cents because this month we've expanded our Mosh Pit section to be a mammoth 10-page holiday gift buyer's guide. It's huge, it was a blast to write, and it's filled with all kinds of neat stuff to buy your partner/parent/bestie/self.

Let's not forget the dude with the yellow mask who's sitting pretty (and not-so-pretty) on our cover this month. Or covers, shall I say. Yes, we like to experiment with things from time to time – keep things interesting and all that – just be glad that we didn't decide to put blood in the bag this month. At least it wouldn't be sand.

And of course, this time of year means binge-gaming all-round, indicated by our otherwise complete lack of previews, but a monstrous 14 reviews. We had some gems this month and January is already shaping up to match. It really is a good time of year to be a gamer.

I'd also like to welcome Sarah "Bellum" Browne to our writing team. Be sure to read the words that she wrote for you and let me know how they make you feel. Sarah will be handling the writing of sports games and probably a few other things along the way, so don't scare her off or I'll have nobody else to handle the grunt work!

That's all for now. Hope you all have a kick-ass holiday and if you're stuck in an office or anywhere else that's boring and lonely, be sure to play extra hard in the evenings to make up for it. That's how fun works, right?

Safe travels, and we'll see you next year!

-GeometriX

“Or maybe it's exactly the same. Maybe I'm the one who's changed. Woah.”



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***DISCLAIMER** / Most of the letters sent to this fine publication are printed more or less verbatim (that means we don't edit or fix them for you slow kids at the back), so ignore any spelling or grammatical errors. It's not us... it's you.

letters@nag.co.za

Letter of the Month December 2014

From: arc4deking33

Subject: Media influences reviews?

So... I watched this Machinima podcast where they started talking about game hype. The majority of the podcasters (podcastees?) have dabbled in game journalism and one of them explained that "a true review" is one where the reviewer has had no information about the game whatsoever, no contact with the internet, no hype filled trailers and definitely never knowing the game was ever going to be released anyway. In isolating the reviewer he/she/it has no opinion on the game yet and also no expectations fueled by hype. Thus they can have pure review without complaining about things like: "Hey, where's all this content that they promised me in the trailer?" or "This game is not as pretty as in the trailer" or "My expectations were far greater for this game than the developers could have ever possibly conceived".

I know that you awesome people at NAG aren't complete hyped up fanboys (who ultimately cause the death of the videogame) but have you ever considered that the media around you compels your opinion? Like a bunch of hipsters hating on "the next big thing" because it is "the next big thing" and then complaining about it on social media, thus formulating the reader-of-the-complaints-who-has-not-played-the-game-yet's opinion for them?

I also know that you fabulous people at NAG can not do a complete overhaul of who does the news in the magazine, since it would probably spell out a huge delay in the next NAG release (that does not

seem to have a specified monthly release date anymore, GRRRRR). So what do YOU think: does the media really influence our opinion through tremendous hype-filled trailers? And do you believe that will be a future where gamereviewers are completely deprived of all this hype inducing mumbo-jumbo?

PS: Are "Letter's of the Month" and "Caption's of the Month" randomly picked? Or are each and every one of them tediously read through?

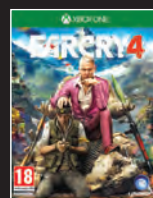
PPS: Your magazine is absolutely awesome!!!!1

I don't know if I agree entirely with the concept of a "true review", but it's certainly a nice idea. Let's look at it this way: games journalists, or perhaps games writers more accurately, are gamers first and foremost. We just so happen to be paid to be neck-deep in the industry, soaking up every bit of information that's available and pushing ourselves to use our knowledge in a meaningful way. This leads to an interesting phenomenon: we become somewhat desensitised to this influx of media and hype. Through what some would call over-exposure, we develop ways to process it in a way that can be put to use. Like writing news pieces or previews, interviewing developers, and playing pre-release code of a game.

But we're still humans, subject to bias that is sometimes influenced by outside factors, and I think that's okay – we represent the gamers who read our writing. I've always maintained that a

THIS MONTH'S PRIZE

The "Letter of the month" prize is sponsored by the good folks at Megarom. The winner receives two games for coming up with the most inspired bit of wisdom or cleverness. **NOTE** / You can't change the games or the platform they come on.



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interactive

game review is a personal opinion and not a robotic analysis, and it's important for readers to find the reviewers that they trust and believe, and learn which reviewers are not to be trusted.

Although sometimes, just occasionally, we get to review a game that we know very little about. That does lead to some interesting experiences and it's for those reasons that I have a particular love of giving people review games that they wouldn't ordinarily choose. I try to mix it up as much as possible. Ed.

PS: Oh I read them all.

PPS: Aww shucks, thanks!

From: Emil Terhoven

Subject: Heavy data

So after saving for most of the year I was able to purchase a beautiful Xbox One at launch (and I am very happy with her). Within the first few hours of using the new console, two things became quickly apparent:

1. Graphic quality and overall system capabilities were

considerably better than the 360.

2. The data usage/requirements of the new consoles are HUGE compared to the previous generation.

And this led me to wonder just how many/few internet options gamers have. More specifically, is anything other than an uncapped ADSL line a viable option for a gamer?

Now I do know PC users have been living with large downloads for a long time. But I've always felt the consoles were the easy option for the casual gamer - pop in the disc and it plays. Occasional updates and map packs, maybe 1-1.5GB a piece, for example Battlefield 4's add-on packs.

With the new consoles, however, things have obviously

changed considerably. The same map packs that were 1.2 GB on 360 are 6.5GB on the One (I understand why) and the free games that came with the console are 40GB downloads. Who has that other than an uncapped customer?

I have been playing online via an MTN wireless router for a long while now. On the old console it worked great. I had to manage my cap but i could download extra content after midnight and it was all good. Now even a game update nearly kills the cap, and my NAT is suddenly strict on the One (a different story).

Which leads me back to my original thought. It seems, to truly be able to enjoy all the content available to the modern day gamer, you dont have much choice but to go the uncapped route. And if you can't, you're pretty much stuck.

Bugger.

Internet connectivity is fast becoming the lifeblood of the games industry. Of course, as producers of an old-school, analogue sort of product, we at NAG are a little conflicted about embracing the future, but ultimately every gamer (and really, every person) is going to have to suck it up and get a proper Internet connection, whatever it takes.

Thankfully the costs of such things are continuously decreasing so it's only a matter of time.

Game downloads are a funny thing, though; we've been chatting in the office a lot lately about our move to a cover DVD from a CD all those years back. It was an easy decision then because most PC gamers had migrated to the superior technology, whereas now, the uptake of Blu-ray has been almost nil. PC gamers (and as you say, more and more console gamers) are simply downloading their games – at least they're tending to do it more legitimately these days! It'll be an interesting few years ahead. Ed.

From: Latham Hendricks

Subject: Changes of Saints Row

Greetings guys at NAG and readers. Sequels should stay the way it is but one special sequel did not stand by that rule."SAINTS ROW".But first let's all think back to the original SR.Remember the 3 gangs we had to take town in order to control the city. Man that was AWESOME.The good old SR.You could also walk around with a MP3 Player listen music(Don't



ON THE FORUMS

Like walking through hot coals, joining in the NAG Forums is both a painful but spiritually enlightening process. Only there's no bucket of water on standby in case things get out of hand. www.nag.co.za/forums

QUESTION / What's your favourite game that nobody else seems to like or know about?

Hellgate: London. Universally hated and totally my secret game-crush.

- Nferno

The Spiderwick Chronicles. Got it for my wife (its her favourite movie)...but guess who plays it the most...

- williegawiesia



The Bards Tale. The story was total trash, but the VO's were AMAZING!

- Acinixys

Borderlands. My brother hates it OMG!

- Infamous_Killer

know why they took it out).Now SR 2.Game was good.Not better than the original though(Just because they took out the MP3 Player)but still a great game.This is where the sequel changed.SR The Third. What happened to SR.I was excited at first but when I saw S.T.A.G and the zombies.It just killed the spark between me and SR(at a moment I thought they were drugged).Then the upgrades.Good at first then got boring because I was too busy being IMMORTAL(I'm the person that don't want all the power in the world).SR IV.Don't have it and don't wanna buy any of those new SR's anymore.Too boring.Don't like the changing of THQ's SR sequel.If THQ had kept the way it is, it would probably be better than Rockstar's GTA sequel because gangbanging is better than sci-fi/ political/alien/zombie/superpower genre(For me don't know about you guys out there reading)etc.So how do you feel about the changes of SR.Do you think they should have kept it to a realistic gangbanging fighting or change it to a sci-fi action fighting aliens/zombies and being the president.Happy festive season everyone.

I loved Saints Row: The Third. I spent more time bashing people in the face with a giant purple dildo bat than what could be considered healthy. I think it's important for games to find their own identities, and with SR being so similar in nature (at first glance, at least) to GTA, its best way forward was to distance itself. I dig the sci-fi stuff myself but I guess everyone is different. So, do I think they should have kept it realistic? Nope, and I don't think it ever really was. It's okay for us to disagree though, we can still be friends. Ed.

From: Jason Batzofin

Subject: Gaming is a waste of time!

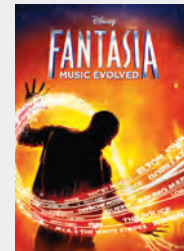
Many people have come up to me and said that I waste my time gaming instead of doing other stuff that will achieve something, like model boat building, you know something useful...

There are actually many advantages of gaming. I love my computer gaming but also my board gaming. I have national colours for mind sports. Mind Sports South Africa are the people in charge of all our gaming needs,



Jessica Meyer, "This is a picture of you guys as characters from my favourite games :) Sorry to anyone who got left out, it's only because I don't know what you look like... From left to right is Pippa, Neo, Rodain, Tarryn, Geoff, Michael, Miklos, Delano and of course Miktar is on the rocket. Keep up the awesome!" [Thanks for leaving me out, AD. :)]

🔔 This is the best bit of fan created artwork we received at NAG this month. If you insert, use or create a piece of gaming artwork incorporating the NAG logo you might also end up here for your three lines of fame. Just don't go and stick the NAG logo on a picture and send it in because that is dumb and dumb people don't win things.



This month's prize courtesy of Prima Interactive is *Fantasia: Music Evolved*, valued at R699.95



pretty much. Other than actual equipment. Back to the point. Many companies nowadays look at things like; oh he has played for SA in this. Some companies only accept people who have done a certain mind sport. You can get scholarships and bursaries with these achievements. Who ever got a scholarship to UCT with model boat building?

Even playing games at a casual level has it's perks. Some studies have shown that sick or injured people (especially children) who play games during the injury can take their mind off the pain and stress so they recover faster. Games help with the essential skills in life such as hand eye coordination, making quick decisions under a time pressure. Some games even help language and math skills. Tracking xp, reading the story, following dialogue. Calculating how much ammo you have left. Simple but necessary skills.

Many games help children gain confidence in themselves. A lot of games are about city building, governing etc. This teaches kids about life indirectly. Online gaming even helps people to deal with people. And because these people don't know who or where you are, you can make mistakes with them and not ruin your career in business.

Games teach people to problem solve especially games like Skyrim and other Bethesda games. Most games make people want to improve get to the next rank.

People persevere when they play games, especially all of you playing Dark Souls. Computer gaming can build teamwork and can develop leadership.

To big problem with why so many people see computer games as bad is because only the negative effects are publicised. Man kills because of computer game - front page news. Team wins LoL tournament 5 games to none - "What's a LoL?"

People need to see the good things about computer games and stop focusing on all the negative things and look at what has been achieved.

Well that's my two cents on the matter...

I love your suggestion that Skyrim can teach people how to solve problems.

"Steve, our server has gone offline and I need access to my email! I have to deliver a presentation in five minutes!"

"Sure thing boss, give me a sec to suit up and I'll head down into the nearby dungeons; I heard there's a tome there with a magic spell that can help us."

I do like your connection to perseverance, though. That's an interesting point. I don't know if games have taught me any sort of patience or perseverance, but I suppose some games can replicate the process of meditation: pulling you out of your current situation and forcing you to solve new problems, or take a little journey inside your brain. That kind of thought-pattern engineering is

THE SHORTS

[extracts of LOL from the NAG audience]

"You guys kinda switched the 'plus' and 'minus' about, I think shadow of Mordor..."
- Christiaan

"I'm the only one playing different genres like COD, NFS, even Pikmin. I mean can't people explore"
- Paige Ramsay

"Finally, it's a good time to be a Horror gamer again!"
- Alec Brynard

the good stuff, and can definitely improve one's cognitive and problem-solving abilities.

Your two cents has been well received. Thanks! Just a few more and I can buy a Chappie. Ed.

ON TWITTER

@nagcoza 

Calvin Combrink

@nagcoza keep up the great magazine!! Secretly reading my Nov NAG behind my study work, much better than studying right?!!

Alec Samuel

What a sad, yet brilliantly written, goodbye piece to an amazing column for @nagcoza @Miktar I will miss your columns

Daniel Esterhuizen

My girlfriend couldn't decide if she wanted to get the NAG or Woman's Health. She made the right choice. I have a great girlfriend @nagcoza

[RiPz] thatkidSIMY

Take me back to @rAgeExpo :(where people are friendly and the Internet's super fast.

T-Man

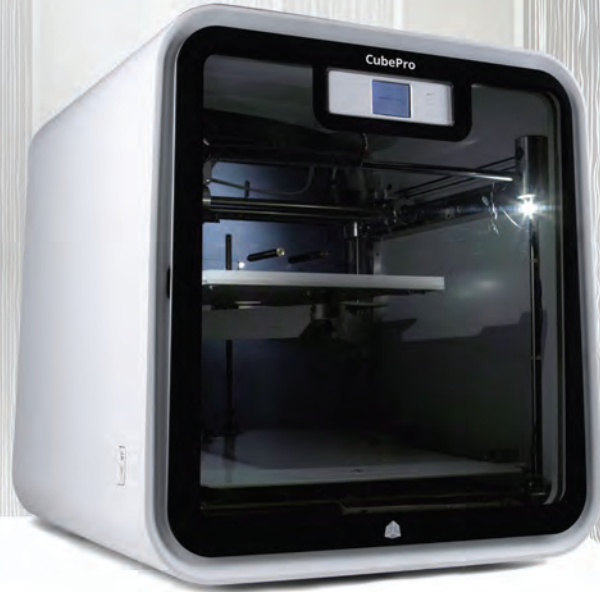
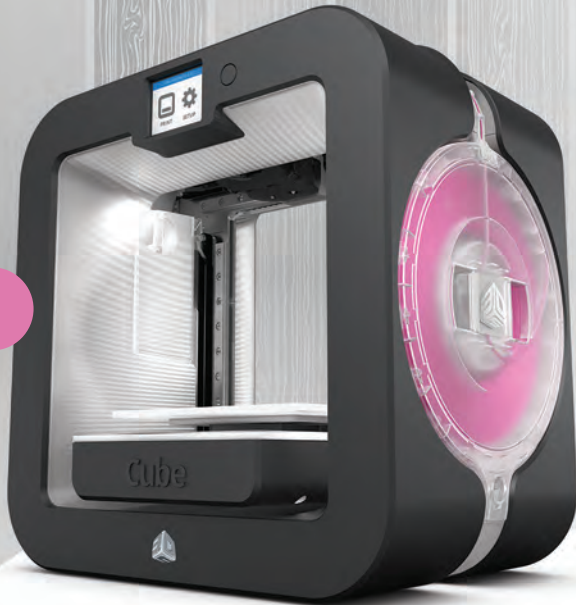
@nagcoza is a great magazine... But i think you guys are just a load of money-munchers #LoL

Gustav

@nagcoza When are you updating the system builder's and laptop buyer's guides again?

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HOUSE**

Miklós' deep dark secret is that he is inexplicably attracted to girls wearing pineapple hats. Somewhere in his past there is a colourful story about uncle Phil and a trip to Durban.

PIXEL FIX

by Miklós Szecsei

Let's not forget why we do this

This was going to be *another* serious column, but then I realised that the last few that I've written have been unwaveringly pessimistic in both topic and tone. I was going to use this space to discuss that *awful* Hatred game that was announced a few weeks back. I was going to express my exasperation at the murder simulator, but in the end the game's announcement ended up being the cherry on the top of my "oh-shit-what-is-going-on-in-this-industry-I-can't-even" sundae, and I found myself slipping into a blissful state of overwhelmed pessimism. You know, that state that finally makes you snap and stop caring out of fear for the last shreds of your already tatty sanity.

I think it's been a pretty rough couple of months in the gaming industry, and when you're entirely submerged in the happenings of the gaming world, it's very easy to be caught up in the zeitgeist of any given moment. If you've been paying attention then you'll know that there hasn't been a lot of good stuff happening thanks to GamerGate, misogyny, online bullying, and the vocal dregs of the industry making things tremendously depressing for the rest of us. It is, as I'm sure many of you will agree, very easy to be swallowed by the gaping maw of despair. Now that I think about it this all sounds really, *really* dramatic, but over the last few months I've come dangerously close to forgetting why it is I play and write about games to begin with. (SPOILER: it's FOR FUN, in case you were in the same boat as me).

Video games are supposed to be about fun and entertainment. Not all of them; some are there to make a point or make you see a bigger picture, but at its core, this industry is built on the backs of two elements: fun and entertainment.

I'm not advocating an ostrich-head-in-sand mind-set; the discussions and changes that the industry has enacted over the last months have been terrific. It is, however, time to take a step back; it's time to remove yourself from the relentless din of Twitter, Facebook, forums, and other corners of the Internet that have a knack for compounding negativity. It's time to do this in case we forget why we're doing this. (It's for fun, remember?)

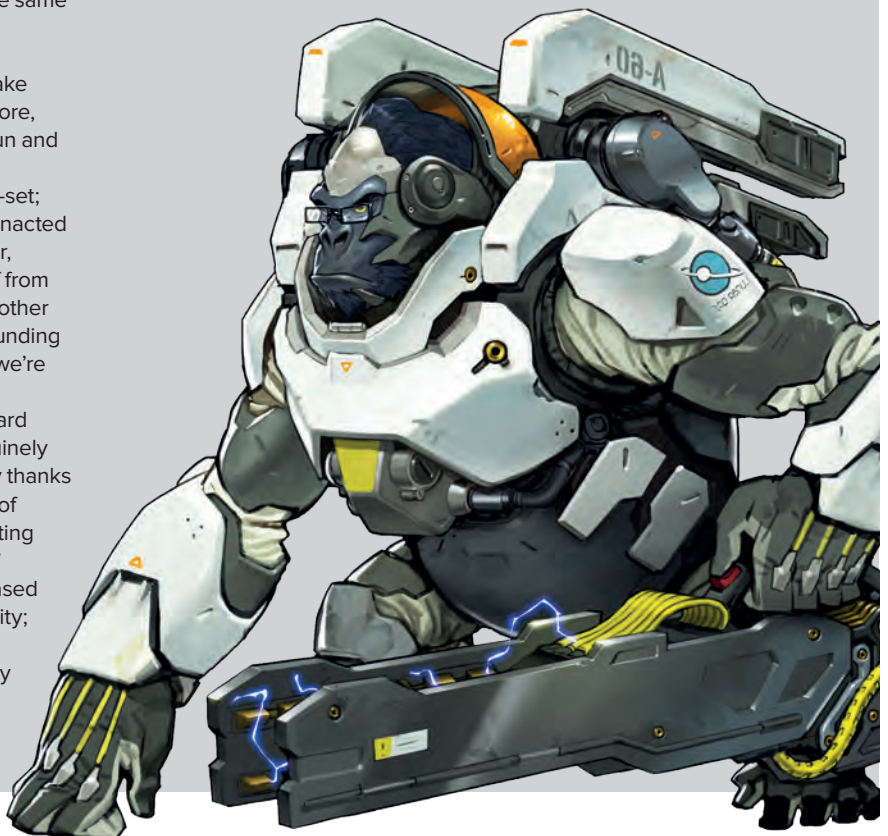
There's plenty to be "yay!" about right now. Blizzard just announced a new IP and it looks great! I'm genuinely excited for *Overwatch* and that excitement is largely thanks to the overt diversity that's on display in their roster of playable characters. It's like all that furore about getting playable characters beyond the "generic white guy" blueprint has paid off. Now we get to play a team-based online shooter as a cyborg gorilla. Now *that's* diversity; silverbacks all over the DRC are celebrating in the knowledge that they are finally being represented by the gaming industry.

Then there's CD Projekt RED – those lovable rogues who have brought us *The Witcher* games.

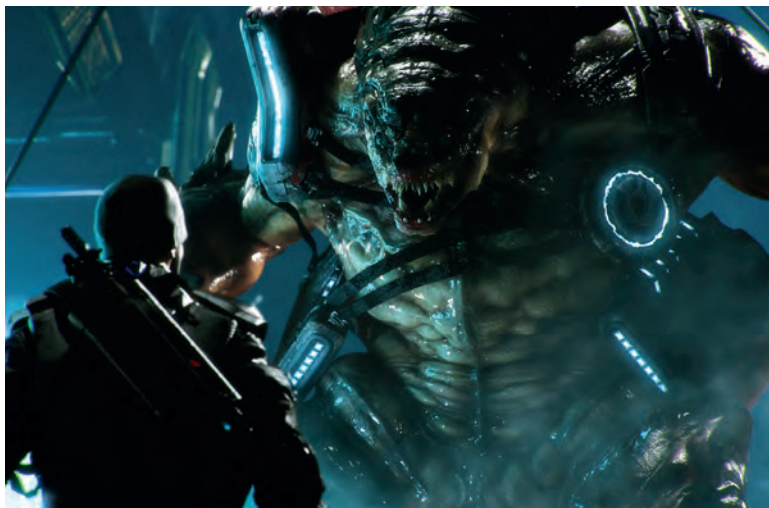
While they still have room to grow insofar as female portrayals go, they're totally *nailing* this whole "being awesome to your customers" thing. DLC is a touchy subject, and CD Projekt tackled it head-on in their announcement that *The Witcher 3* is getting 16 pieces of downloadable content... *for free*. Of course this begs the question: if the content is free to everyone, why isn't it just in the game already? I like to think the answer is that CD Projekt wanted to make a statement. I like to think that while CD Projekt typed up that announcement, they were flexing and warming up their middle fingers lest they strain them as they thrust them defiantly into the air, aimed at the likes of those publishers obsessed with shovelling DLC all over the place. Look at all of those Polish middle fingers; look at them waving a big "F*** You" to President Business.

So you see, it's not all that bad. We even got a pretty damn awesome *Call of Duty* this year, and when was the last time that happened? I really enjoyed the campaign. Who even says that about a *Call of Duty* title these days? I had actual fun, and not just because I had Kevin Spacey being very *angry* at me. For the first time since *Modern Warfare*, *Call of Duty* felt exciting. Newcomers Sledgehammer Games need high-fives for breathing life into a series that lost appeal for me many years ago.

Don't forget: we do this **FOR FUN**. **NAG**



Prey 2 steps through a portal to nowhere



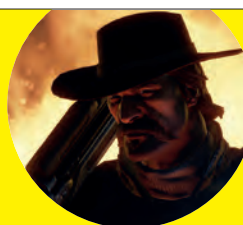
As the headline vaguely suggests, the embattled development of the sequel to 2006's wonderfully inventive FPS *Prey* has finally been brought to a halt. It's widely known that the game's creative journey has been fraught with turmoil, and Bethesda VP Pete Hines finally delivered the sad news to CNET.

"It was a game we believed in, but we never felt that it got to where it needed to be — we never saw a path to success if we finished it," said Hines. "It wasn't up to our quality standard and we decided to cancel it. It's no longer in development. That wasn't an easy decision, but it's one that won't surprise many folks given that we hadn't been talking about it."

Sad times indeed, but it's been obvious that this has been coming for a while now. There is, however, a modicum of comfort to be gleaned if you read between the lines of some of Hines' other statements. Specifically the statements that "Human Head Studios is no longer working on [it]" and "it's a franchise we still believe we can do something with — we just need to see what that something is".

Notice that Hines doesn't necessarily say that there's no *Prey* game in the works, just that Human Head's *Prey 2* as we know it (with its space-borne bounty hunting and *Blade Runner* aesthetic) is dead. This adds fuel to the rumour that *Dishonored* dev Arkane Studios is working on a game set in the *Prey* universe. If this turns out to be the case and Arkane's game shares anything in common with Human Head's design, here's hoping they use something like *Shadow of Mordor*'s Nemesis System to power the bounty hunting.

Evolve gets new hunters



Evolve developer Turtle-Rock Studios has unveiled new additions to the hunter's roster: Abe the Trapper and Cabot the support. Abe gets a rapid-fire shotgun and stasis grenades, which slow down the monster considerably, while Cabot can detect the monster from long ranges with his radioactive orbital dust strike and fire at them through walls with a rail rifle. Neat.

With *Evolve*'s February launch looming, it's a fair bet that more hunters and monsters will be announced soon to fill out the 4v1 roster.



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Pippa secretly runs an Agony Aunt website called Talk to Pips, there she lures in the needy and desperate with initial good and helpful advice, this soon changes to terrible advice and wrecked lives.

THE GAME STALKER

by Pippa Tshabalala

Shame

I've spoken on more than one occasion about being a woman in the gaming industry, but as you may have noticed in recent months, the big topic of debate is #Gamergate. You might have already heard of Gamergate on Twitter. You might have heard mixed reports of what it's actually about. I don't have space to discuss the different arguments here – you're an adult, Google it. The reality however, regardless of whether you agree that it's about ethics in videogame journalism or about misogyny in the videogame industry, is that it has resulted in a large amount of abuse being directed at female developers and journalists as well as anyone who supports them openly.

This is not ok. Honestly if you need someone to tell you this, then there is something seriously wrong here. There is a big difference between trolling someone on social media/forums and death threats. Yes, you read correctly – death threats. When someone has to leave their house because they've received death threats, that's not ok. When gamers threaten to commit a school shooting if a supposed "feminazi" is allowed to give a lecture, that is not ok. When a proponent and self-styled leader of Gamergate dismisses these death threats as deceptions (even with evidence to the contrary), that is not ok.

This takes our society and the progression we have made towards equal rights across the spectrum of gender, race and sexuality a hundred steps backwards.

So, is Gamergate about ethics in videogame journalism? There is a very strong suggestion that on many levels it is and I'm not going to gloss over that for the sake of argument. Should developers and publishers be bribing journalists or befriending them in order to get better scores for their games? No of course not, it is completely unethical and it definitely should be frowned upon and addressed.

But should the resulting backlash against women (developers and journalists) in the gaming industry involve their personal details being published online? Should it be ok for Gamergaters to write "HANG HER HANG HER HANG HER!" in the comments section of a video? Should it be ok for both women and men to be afraid to speak out for fear of being harassed? No. It's not ok.

The fact that many of us avoid engaging with Gamergate in a public space like Twitter doesn't mean we're just letting it slide – don't take our silence for assent. We know that more than likely there won't be any meaningful engagement and debate over the ethics of Gamergate and online harassment, it will just be mudslinging and trolling in which case it's best to avoid responding in any way.

But this does not make it ok. We make games and write about games because we love videogames. And surely you share this passion with us otherwise this wouldn't even be an issue.

This other stuff? It's not ok. And if you think it is you should be ashamed of yourself.

The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask is heading to the 3DS

The Nintendo 64 classic *Majora's Mask* came out and enthralled *Zelda* fans 14 years ago. The game made later appearances on the GameCube and eventually the Wii Virtual Console in 2009. It's now making the jump to handhelds and will be arriving on the Nintendo 3DS sometime during our autumn 2015.

Officially called *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask 3D*, the remake will make use of the handheld's 3D capabilities. "As we worked on the remake version, we set out to maintain the original level of challenge, while keeping the game accessible for anyone," Nintendo president Satoru Iwata said during a Nintendo Direct announcement.



In 2011, *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* was ported to the 3DS as well. *Majora's Mask* is the follow-up to *Ocarina of Time*, so it's nice to have both games appearing on the handheld.

900 classic arcade games are playable right now in your browser

It's the Festive Season!

A time for boundless cheer, excessive jolliness and probably a few fights around the Christmas tree over who gets to open their presents first. Even the Internet's getting in on spreading joy, with the fine people over at The Internet Archive opening the doors of The Internet Arcade, which houses around 900 classic arcade games, playable from the comfort of your browser window.

It's thanks to the efforts of Jason Scott and the many people who worked on JSMESS (or JavaScript Mess, a massive project with the aim of porting a multiplatform emulator into the JavaScript language), who've made it possible to run games that would usually only run in a MAME emulator directly in your browser. Classics like *Galaga*, *Out Run*, *Defender* and more are all available to play. It's the perfect way to get them nostalgia juices flowing, or to discover what all the fuss was about if you've never played any of these games before.

Be warned, however, that some of the games do suffer from minor technical glitches. Head over to <http://bit.ly/1q91zq4> if you're ready for a jog down memory lane.



Exhumed Atari cartridges selling for thousands



Back in the June 2014 edition of NAG we wrote about a documentary being made about the infamous Atari cartridge burial site in the New Mexico desert. Back in the early '80s, Atari disposed of thousands of unsold Atari 2600 cartridges, which included unsold copies of the much maligned *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*. The documentary filmmakers dug up hundreds of copies of the old 2600 games, and many of those exhumed copies are now up for auction on eBay.

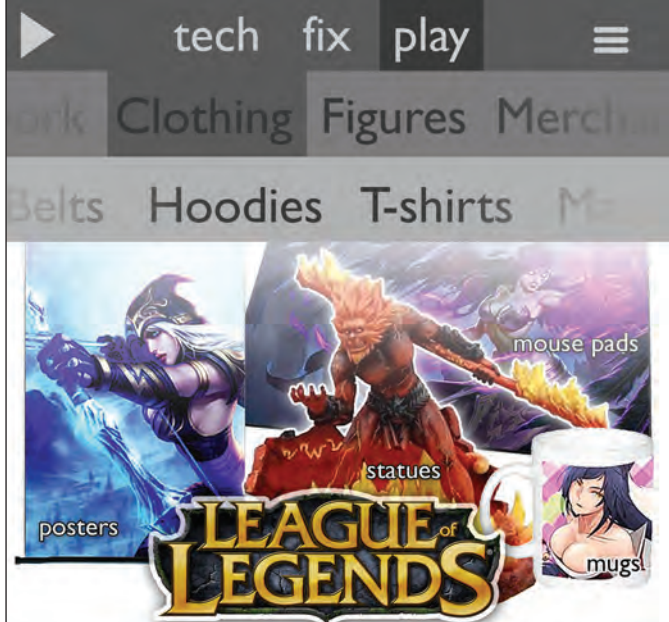
The auction is being conducted by Tularosa Basin Historical Society, so all of the mangled, dusty copies of the old games have been catalogued and numbered. There are boxed copies of *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* selling for over R9,000.00, while cartridges without boxes are fetching upwards of R2,000.00.

Other exhumed Atari titles include copies of *Centipede*, *Phoenix*, *Missile Command* and more up for grabs. Those titles, however, aren't selling for nearly as much as the industry's most infamous financial disaster: *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*.

Destiny has 9.5 million registered users



Publisher Activision Blizzard has announced that *Destiny* has over 9.5 million registered users. The figure came shortly after the announcement that *Destiny* now holds the record for the most successful new franchise launch in industry history. What Activision didn't reveal is how many of those 9.5 million users are active. They did, however, announce that active players spend on average three hours a day playing *Destiny*. Activision Publishing CEO Eric Hirshberg announced that Bungie has also officially kicked off development on the *Destiny* sequel.



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The Witcher 3 gets 16 pieces of DLC

“...absolutely for free, regardless of platform.”

CD Projekt RED has announced that next year's open-world role-playing game, *The Witcher 3*, will be getting no less than 16 pieces of downloadable content. That doesn't sound like the development team we've known for all these years; the team that's been strongly against the concept of charging customers for extra content. Good thing they're not charging for this DLC then. Yes, in a rather cheeky open letter by co-founder and joint CEO Marcin Iwiński, CD Projekt announced that all 16 pieces will be given away for free.

“As gamers, we nowadays have to hold on tight to our wallets, as surprisingly right after release, lots of tiny pieces of tempting content materialize with a steep price tag attached. Haven't we just paid a lot of cash for a brand new game?”

CD Projekt, however, has always gone out of their way to treat their customers differently, which is why their previous games don't use DRM or offer paid-for DLC. “We strongly believe this is not the way it should work,” Iwiński continued. “Everyone who buys *Wild Hunt* will receive 16 specially prepared DLCs absolutely for free, regardless of platform. You don't have to pre-order, you don't have to buy any special edition to get them – if you own a copy of *Wild Hunt*, they're yours. This is our way of saying thank you for buying our game.”

The DLC will begin releasing in pairs every week starting on the day that *The Witcher 3* launches – 24 February 2015. For eight weeks, players can look forward to a variety of additional content ranging from new missions to more cosmetic add-ons like beards and hairstyles for Geralt.



StarCraft II: Legacy of the Void detailed

First announced way back in 2008, the conclusion to the *StarCraft II* trilogy has finally had some light shed on it. *Legacy of the Void* follows the Protoss, led by hierarch Artanis, as they travel through space. Artanis is in command of The Golden Armada, a vast array of Protoss ships, as well as The Spear of Adun. The Spear will serve as your flagship, and houses the remnants of the Protoss civilisation as they seek to reclaim their homeworld. You'll be contending with the iconic Zerg, Terran mercenaries, and a new foe called Amon.

Despite being healthily steeped in series lore, *Legacy* will also bring some new multiplayer features to the table, such as daily tournaments and a co-op objective mode. By far the most interesting addition is “Archon Mode”, where you and a teammate control the same base and play a pseudo-1v1 match against an opponent. This of course means you're sharing all base-building, resource-managing and ‘ling-rushing responsibilities with another human, which could lead to great fun or massive arguments. *Legacy of the Void* still doesn't have a release date, but with more announcements sure to follow you had best clear a chunk of your schedule.

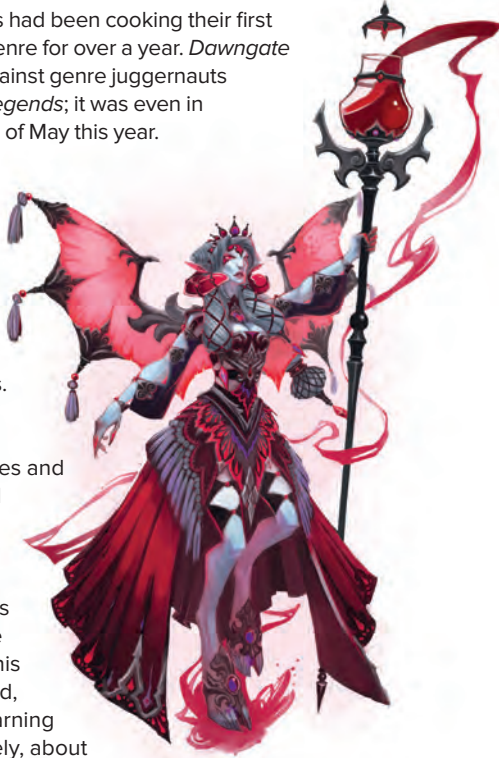


Electronic Arts ceases development of Dawngate

Publisher Electronic Arts had been cooking their first foray into the MOBA genre for over a year. *Dawngate* was meant to go up against genre juggernauts like *Dota 2* and *League of Legends*; it was even in the midst of an open beta as of May this year. Unfortunately for in-house EA studio Waystone Games, Electronic Arts has decided to cancel the game. The game will remain playable in its open beta form until sometime in February 2015. After that, however, EA will flip the switch on the servers.

"We've taken a lot of feedback from players and delivered lots of new features and innovations," group general manager Matt Bromberg said in an official statement on the *Dawngate* website. "And although the game has grown, we're not seeing the progress we'd hoped for. This isn't the outcome we wanted, but beta testing is about learning and improving, and ultimately, about making difficult decisions about how to proceed."

As for the players who spent money on the game during its beta, EA has promised full refunds. As for the team at Waystone Games, it is unclear what their next project (if any) might be.



Bungie executive the latest industry victim of "swatting"

A Bungie executive was recently woken up at 4am by SWAT helicopters and armed police surrounding his home. It turned out that he was yet another victim of the "swatting prank" phenomenon. Police received an anonymous tipoff that the executive had taken a family hostage and was hiding in his house with assault rifles and explosives rigged in the garden. Obviously the Bungie executive hadn't done anything of the sort.



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You can't keep a good Dyack down



Despite all those unconfirmed rumours alluding to Denis Dyack (the crestfallen founder of defunct dev studio Silicon Knights) not being the nicest person on Earth (that's an understatement), you've got to hand it to the guy – he sure is tenacious. After two failed Kickstarter attempts to get *Shadow of the Eternals* – the spiritual successor to excellent GameCube survival horror

Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem – funded by players (who clearly find Dyack's reputation dubious), he's back again, this time as the chief creative officer of Quantum Entanglement Entertainment, a new multimedia company.

Quantum Entanglement is described as a "unique entertainment company that creates television, games, and film all under one umbrella". Dyack made some

bold statements in an interview with IGN that games, movies and television will all converge into some sort of transmedia superforce in the future. With that in mind, *Shadow of the Eternals* is back in production, and Dyack says they're looking at the game from the film and television side as well. All we're really hoping for here is a worthy successor to *Eternal Darkness*. Please make this happen, universe.

Miyamoto details the future of amiibo



Famed game designer and producer Shigeru Miyamoto has revealed that Nintendo's much-anticipated upcoming range of NFC-powered amiibo toys for the Wii U and 3DS won't stop at just being toys. Eventually there'll also be amiibo cards that will bring a unique gameplay experience to Nintendo devices.

Miyamoto likens the tech to a modern realisation of the e-Reader cards that Nintendo used with the Game Boy Advance, and could be used to unlock new items, mini-games and levels in Nintendo products. He says that when "amiibo become cards, [they] can create a game which can be played only by passing several cards over the NFC reader/writer, and the results will be stored in the amiibo card", which would unlock "the potential to propose new ways to play card games".

Nintendo also plans to release smaller, more affordable amiibo figures in the future, and many upcoming Nintendo games are being developed from the ground up with amiibo in mind. There's a ton that's possible with the amiibo toys, and we're excited to see what Nintendo does with them. "Nintendo is known as a video game company, but in fact, it is also a toy company. Toys must make consumers feel a sense of wonder," adds Miyamoto.

Bungie gives *Destiny* player unique gift



It's not every day that a developer does something heart-warming, but this is one of those times. A *Destiny* community manager ("Deej") has gifted a fan with a unique scout rifle. The fan was recovering from multiple brain surgeries and was playing *Destiny* for physical therapy. The fan's wife shared his story on Reddit, and the rifle was swiftly sent to him. At this point, he is the only *Destiny* player with it, although it may make its way to the rest of the players in a future update. Until then, it's nice to see a developer care for their gamers.

Microsoft officially takes ownership of Mojang and *Minecraft*

Back in September, the industry was shaken by news that Microsoft had opted to purchase Swedish developer Mojang and the *Minecraft* IP. The deal was worth \$2.5 billion. On 06 November, Microsoft officially took ownership of the company and franchise. It remains to be seen what will happen to the massive *Minecraft* community that's spread over a lot more than just Microsoft's platforms.



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Blizzard announces Overwatch

Company's first new IP in years

Blizzard was really busy during their recent annual BlizzCon event. And one of the highlights was the announcement of *Overwatch*, an online multiplayer FPS. *Overwatch* is set in a futuristic Earth, and follows the antics of the titular Overwatch, a team of soldiers and scientists tasked with keeping the world safe. The actual gameplay has a strong *Team Fortress 2* lean to it, and squares off teams of 6v6 in objective-based maps. Players select one of many highly diverse characters, ranging from agile scouts to turret-building dwarves, a sentient gorilla, and several robots. If you can't tell yet, the game doesn't take itself too seriously, and the graphics are bright and look like a Pixar movie. It also has a surprising number of *Hearthstone* quotes, proving that Blizzard knows how to play to the fans.

Besides the varied character roster, Blizzard wants to make the game appealing to a wide audience. They described that their goal is to "create an awesome FPS experience that's more accessible to a much wider audience while delivering the action and depth that shooter fans love". So far, only three maps have been unveiled, and all show a delightful mix of real-world locations mixed with high-tech futurism.

Overwatch's announcement comes on the heels of the recent cancellation of long-awaited Blizzard MMO *Titan*. The developers went on to confirm that various elements of *Titan*'s PvP were repurposed into *Overwatch*. As of now, no release date is confirmed beyond an early 2015 open beta. Pricing hasn't been confirmed either, so we will have to wait and see if this will be free-to-play like *Team Fortress 2*.



WoW! Microtransactions for charity!

In a surprising move, Blizzard has announced a new *World of Warcraft* pet coming soon to the Battle.net shop. Named Argi, this impossibly cute goat critter does more than inspire squeals of delight.

Blizzard's partnered with the American Red Cross association and all proceeds from Argi purchases go towards Ebola relief efforts. If you want this little ankle-biter to join your quest (and if you want to help fight Ebola), then you can pick up your own Argi from December 3rd for \$10.



Turn-based arrow to the knee

If you've played *Frozen Synapse*, you'll know what we mean when we say that freshly announced *Flamberge* is a simultaneous turn-based tactical RPG. Essentially this means that while combat plays out in turns, the actions taken by you and your enemy during the planning phase play out at the same time. This makes for an interesting dynamic where you're trying to predict what your enemy will do so you can set up attacks, plan movement and engage defensive manoeuvres to foil their upcoming plans once the turn is resolved.

The game's employing an eye-catching pixel art aesthetic to visualise its medieval



theme, and there'll be both a hand-crafted single-player mode alongside what will likely be a brilliantly fun multiplayer offering. There'll also be a number of different characters to play as, and a range of

different abilities and classes to choose from. At the time of this writing, *Flamberge*'s two-man dev team has smashed their modest \$1,500 Kickstarter goal with many days still on the clock.



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Hearthstone gets first expansion



The ever-popular online *Warcraft* trading-card game *Hearthstone* is receiving its first full expansion. Called *Goblins vs Gnomes* the expansion pack deals with the conflict of *Warcraft*'s (spoiler warning) goblins and gnomes. The expansion promises over 120 new cards, as well as a new type of minion,

the robotic "Mech" class. The cards can be found in clearly marked packs inside the *Hearthstone* shop at exactly the same price as the regular cards, which means you can buy them with in-game gold or regular ol' money.

Besides the new cards, spectator mode was announced, which expands the

possibilities for professional play. And while no new heroes were announced, a new themed playing-arena was unveiled, full of levers and buttons just begging to be tinkered with during your opponent's long turn. The launch date of the expansion just says "this December", and will be supported by all versions of *Hearthstone*.

Family feuds: more info on Telltale's Game of Thrones

Telltale Games has revealed that its upcoming six-part episodic adventure *Game of Thrones* (based on the TV show of the same name, which is in turn based on George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* novels) will feature five playable characters, and all five of those characters represent the same family – House Forrester. Some of the characters are direct family members, others are in the house's service.

Forrester is a northern house that hasn't yet appeared in the TV show, but they do feature in

the novels. Their allegiance lies with the Starks of Winterfell – so we're guessing there'll be some vengeance in order. You'll travel to familiar locations like King's Landing and The Wall, and as with Telltale's other adventures (like *The Walking Dead* and *The Wolf Among Us*), you'll have to make careful decisions that will impact the flow of the narrative. Considering this is *Game of Thrones*, you should prepare yourself for some gut-wrenching consequences.



CloudGate, an Android computer for home, work and play



CloudGate is a powerful mini-computer, running Google's Android operating system. It costs just R 1,999 or R3,999 for the bundle pictured above. Plug it into any HD screen, add a keyboard and mouse, provide a basic Internet connection and you have a powerful system for home, work or play.

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Heroes of the Storm beta inbound



Good news for Blizzard and MOBA fans: *Heroes of the Storm* is slated to enter closed beta on January 13, 2015. Revealed during the recent BlizzCon, prospective players can apply to join the beta on the Battle.net website. Blizzard will also reportedly send out more invites than before to get as many players as possible into the testing. Ranked play was also discussed, which is divided into two leagues: one for solo play or teams smaller than five, and one for 5v5 only.

Four new faces will also join the roster. Thrall, Jaina, and Sylvanas are debuting and are sure to please the *Warcraft* crowd, and The Lost Vikings (from the game of the same name) are taking to the field as well. The Vikings play uniquely, and either operate as a single unit or can split up into three separate ones. With a few months still until launch, it's quite likely we may see more announcements take the gaming world by storm.

Caption of the month



Every month we'll choose a screenshot from a random

game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better one. The winner will get a copy of Rugby 15 for PS3 from Apex Interactive. Send your captions to letters@nag.co.za with the subject line "**December caption**".



NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR

Just working on my crossfit while I camp, don't mind me.



LAST MONTH'S WINNER

"Draw me like one of your Himalayan Dictators" - Tshepi Mokoena



SUPPORT LINES

Got a legal boxed game and need some technical help? Before you call please do the following. Update your system software, drivers and have a look online for a game patch. Just these simple tasks eliminate 93% of all problems – it's a made up statistic but probably close enough.

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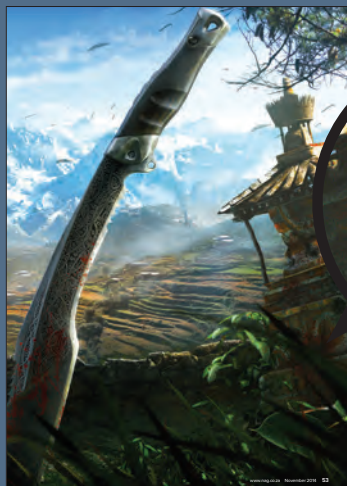
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Roxy hunt

Send your sighting to letters@nag.co.za with the subject line “**December Roxy**”, and of course your contact details, and you could win a prize. Feeling lucky punk?



November winner

Caleigh Sioux, page 53

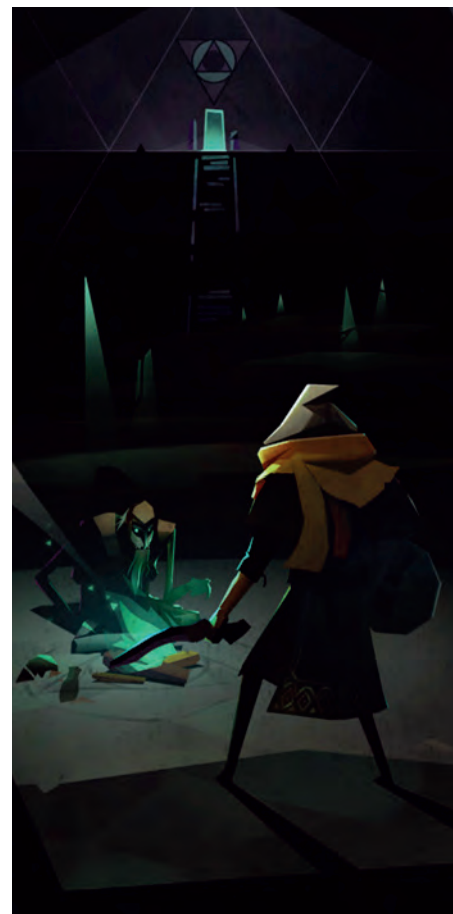
This month's prize

Marvel Dice Masters valued at R225. Sponsored by Skycastle Games.



SKYCASTLE

Shadowrun Returns developer returns with new game



We quite like *Shadowrun Returns*, the Kickstarter-ed tactical RPG from Harebrained Schemes – and if you played it, chances are you like it too. It's good news then that Harebrained is hard at work bringing a new project to life. It's called *Necropolis*, and it's described as “a game of brutal combat and survival, set in a magical deathtrap that shifts and reconstructs itself around you”. Sounds delightful, doesn't it?

Essentially it's a fast-paced roguelike-like dungeon crawler with procedurally-generated environments that pop into being as you move through the game. It's aiming for the lo-fi polygonal art style that's very much in vogue right now, so not only does it look great (despite being all dark and foreboding and stuff), but it's got a brilliantly wicked sense of humour as well. Expect more details in the coming months, with the game set for release sometime in 2016.



home_coded

EXPOSURE FOR SOUTH AFRICAN INDIE DEVELOPERS

by Rodain Joubert

Rodain can't tell the difference between horses and camels no matter how hard he tries or what he does. It's like those people who don't know their left from their right, but with him it's camels and horses.

CARD AND DICE GAMES

Though this series has referred extensively to "board games", it would be more accurate to suggest that the challenges and potential faced by non-digital devs in South Africa are those which face the table-top community, to make the idea more inclusive of concepts such as card games, dice games and others.

For card games specifically, the existence of more standards and templates (as well as the simple fact that there's fewer "exotic" components to produce) means that the creation of a successful card game can theoretically be a lot simpler and easier. Recent popular concepts include *Cartel* from local developer Steven Tu (*Bear Chuck*, *Dead Run*), which also showed at the A MAZE expo this past year.

That's not to say that such games wouldn't meet similar challenges in terms of broad publishing and distributing – but the snarls of manufacturing become a lot easier to deal with.

Breaking into board games (part 2)

And now, as promised last month, we look at the real bottleneck of local board games: moving from exposure to publishing. Part one dealt with Tsitsi Chiumya's *AfterRobot*. Now we'll look at two other projects and their efforts to break through that barrier.

A couple of years ago, an innovative board game concept called *Mixed Monster Martial Arts* wowed judges and won awards at the Cape Town chapter of the 2013 Global Game Jam. Designed and tested by a group of four developers – Jeffrey Rusch, Megan Hughes, Nick Hall and Rolf Weimar – the goal was to build a haphazard creature from a pile of card-based body parts, and have them fight against one another in a simple arena.

The game was silly, yet thoughtful. Jelly-legged pirate beasts were pitched against parrot-beaked dog robots in hilarious battles of carefully-defined stats, where each body part had its own strengths, weaknesses and quirks to affect the overall creature.

Even before GGJ 2013 had come to a close, the team knew they were onto something. Hall was interested in using his connections and legal experience to take the game further. Eugene Vermeulen from Skycastle Games also took note of the game's promise. But the game itself hovered in a development limbo for the next couple of years, progress being slowed by

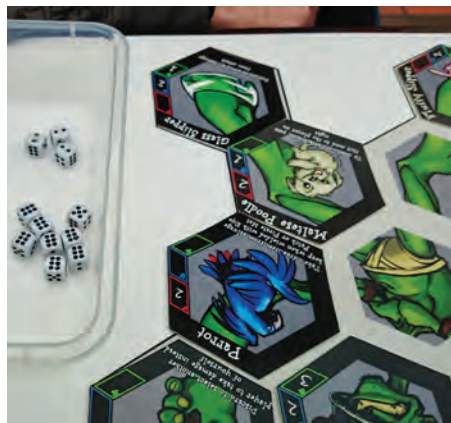
the reality of day-to-day commitments and the different schedules of team members.

With the approach of the 2014 A MAZE festival in Johannesburg, Hughes decided to reimagine *MMMA* as the haphazard goblin fighter *Worst Warriors* (www.worstwarriors.com), sticking to many of the former's basic principles but focusing more carefully on the game's strongest points. Featuring some stylish art by Dorianne Dutrieux and Dawid Strauss, the game received its first major attention spike alongside projects such as *AfterRobot*.

Through the efforts of Skycastle, *Worst Warriors* was also able to feature at the rAge expo and HobbyX, and Hughes says that Vermeulen has been actively seeking out local publishers and distribution options, as well as sourcing creators for custom components like special dice.

Things get a little trickier from there.

To put the current challenges into perspective: while digital game creation has a higher barrier of entry than board



games (you need to own a computer and the right software – you also have to know how to use it!), getting past the first couple of hurdles makes it comparatively easier to be digitally published and distributed, and from there your primary worry is garnering enough sales. Though South Africa does have some territory-related hurdles in place, it's a generally accessible and open platform for locals to get involved with.

Board games are a different beast entirely. The extremely easy and accessible entry point (paper, pen and scissors) is combined with a seemingly inaccessible end goal. Right now, the most reliable and well-known manufacturers are based in Germany and China. Various countries beyond that can deal with supply, shipping and other midway tasks, but South Africa (generally speaking) doesn't have the necessary structures in place to help specialised games – at least beyond individual components that can be helped along by 3D printing.

Beyond that, it's hard to justify creating something in a local market when – as with digital games – a safer, broader market lies overseas.

This is where Rob van Zyl comes in. Over the course of five years, he's developed and published the pulp-horror board game



Ancient Terrible Things (www.ancientterriblethings.com) along with designer Simon McGregor, using an intriguing dice-based system inspired by Yahtzee and a design of McGregor's called *Dice Quest*.

Inspired thematically by van Zyl's travels in south-east Asia, as well as cultural influences like *Indiana Jones*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Apocalypse Now* and the "river into hell" trope, the game has made the single most convincing stab to date with regards to getting a South African board game formally manufactured and distributed.

Though the game was created by a South African, ATT's manufacturing and distribution was all handled overseas and it was necessary for van Zyl's business, Pleasant Company Games, to partner with a US company for several needs which were strictly tied to national territory. van Zyl describes the limitations and frustrations involved with getting the process done locally – options did exist for some of the components, but couldn't cover all of the required bases (a major problem in particular was the requirement for a four-fold board).

"During its Kickstarter campaign, the game raised more than \$27,000 (about R 300,000 – nearly three times as much as the original goal) and went on to sell 2,000 copies."

During its Kickstarter campaign, the game raised more than \$27,000 (about R 300,000 – nearly three times as much as the original goal) and went on to sell 2,000 copies. Notably, only about 60 of those copies went to a South African audience, and van Zyl warns that the intensity and complexity of the Kickstarter was only a small part of a very long and difficult five-year process

that required a great deal of planning and co-operation with external groups. And while he'd recommend the Kickstarter route for other South African indies, he said overall that the board game route was not a particularly lucrative one.

ATT only really made sense from the point of view that it was a part-time, passion-driven project. "Legitimate" board games, though possible, are still very far from being the viable business model in SA that digital game creation has become, and he says that developers going into it now need to understand that.

It's yet to be seen if *Worst Warriors* goes down this route or, like *AfterRobot*, tries something more experimental (especially given the support and interest shown by Skycastle). But Hughes is confident that there's plenty of time to learn, experiment and even make mistakes, with timing and patience rewarding board game designers far more than digital devs. While board games may be more difficult to manufacture and distribute, they're far less saturated and volatile than the digital gaming market. A game idea that's good now – and judging by current player reactions to *WW*, it certainly fits that description – will still be appealing and valid in a year or two, and devs are counting on this to promote a slow and steady growth in the local industry, hopefully helped along by a good deal of teamwork and sharing of resources and knowledge with the rest of the dev community. **NAG**



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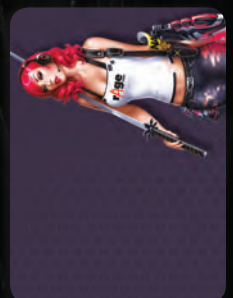
M3



M4



M5



M6

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R210.00

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R210.00

TOTAL

QTY

QTY

QTY

QTY

QTY

QTY

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A close-up, high-contrast photograph of a person's muscular back and shoulder, wearing a dark, textured tactical vest with straps and buckles. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the contours of the muscles and the texture of the gear. The text 'MORTAL KOMBAT X' is overlaid in yellow, and 'GET OVER' is in white, with the 'O' in 'OVER' replaced by the Mortal Kombat dragon logo.

MORTAL KOMBAT X GET OVER



"We're going to be introducing this online metagame that everyone participates in. It's an online experience that is persistent. Everyone is going to be playing it, and there are benefits. It's definitely something that's going to play a major role in people's experience playing *Mortal Kombat*."

Ed Boon, creative director,
NetherRealm

RELEASE DATE / 14 April 2015

PLATFORMS / 360 / PC / PS3 / PS4 / XBO

GENRE / Fighting

DEVELOPER / NetherRealm Studios

PUBLISHER / Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment

WEBSITE / www.mortalkombat.com

ER HERE

It's more than just a line. It's something that every gamer can identify. It's synonymous with a franchise that has helped change fighting games into the shape we know today. It's so iconic, that whenever we hear it we know exactly which series we're talking about. Now, *Mortal Kombat X* will arrive shortly, so get over here and read what NetherRealm Studios is doing with it.

FATALITY!

Mortal Kombat X will bring numerous tweaks, refinements and complete game-changers to the formula. Graphically, the game is taking full advantage of the Unreal Engine 3 with which it was built. Characters are highly detailed, the lighting looks realistic, and the arena backgrounds are crammed with immersive details like civilians or animals going about their business. The animations are also noticeably improved, and NetherRealm has stated they are aiming for 60 fps in gameplay. The Unreal Engine should also allow for a lot of scalability, so the game should look good across all its consoles.

Besides the looks, the game handles differently. It's faster-paced, and feels similar to *Injustice: Gods Among Us*. Most noticeable is the increased environmental interactivity: a quick tap of a shoulder button will either let you escape a corner, or slam a nearby wooden barrel into your opponent's jaw. X-Ray Moves also return from *MK9* and are even more gruesome than ever.

Another exciting feature is the characters' Variant Styles. Each character has three different fighting styles, based around some core tenet. Selecting a style locks you into it for the duration of a fight, and gives you different moves, combos, and tactics to learn. For example, if you play as Scorpion with his Ninjutsu style, then you'll be using far more



"With *Mortal Kombat 9* we introduced Freddy Krueger and Kratos, while in *Injustice* we brought in Scorpion. So you can expect to see a guest character in *MK X*, but who that is, you're gonna have to wait and find out."
Derek Kirtzic, designer,
NetherRealm

"*Mortal Kombat X*
is clearly turning the
violence dial up to 11."





"*Mortal Kombat X* promises to introduce more new fighters than any of the previous games in the series".



weapon combos and sword attacks, whereas his Hellfire Variant is based more on ranged attacks and other fiery shenanigans. What the Variant Styles essentially do is triple the number of characters, and requires you to learn more about your favourite character (and your opponents) if you want to succeed.

And finally, the gore. Oh the gore. *Mortal Kombat X* is clearly turning the violence dial up to 11. Watching an X-Ray Move or an iconic Fatality makes you want to simultaneously cringe and cheer at the detail. Bones will be pulverised into chips, eyeballs will pop, and enough blood will be shed to keep a hospital well stocked with O-negative for years to come.

CHOOSE YOUR FIGHTER!

Any fighting game depends on two things: its fighting system and characters. And besides violence and ultra-gore, the *Mortal Kombat* franchise has always been famous for its characters. Where the first game only had seven, *MK X* will have 24. Some of these are new faces, but a lot are series veterans and returning favourites.

Obviously, it wouldn't be an *MK* game without series mascots Scorpion and Sub-Zero. Scorpion plays as the series' anti-hero: he's been killed before and now he's back with a vengeance, spewing both hellfire and killer catchphrases. Sub-Zero, his eternal

rival, has always been more of a good guy. His ice powers can be used in many ways to hinder or freeze your opponent solid.

Two more characters returning from *MK1* are Kano and Raiden. Kano enters the arena with both his iconic Australian accent (which we can thank the movies for) as well as his cybernetic enhancements. Older and meaner in *MK X*, his Variant Styles include using fast-hitting dagger combos, ranged laser attacks, or a grappling system that is sure to appeal to higher-level fighters.

Raiden on the other hand is still the God of Thunder, and still the main champion for good. After saving the universe by retconning the series in *MK9*, he is now squaring off against newcomer and emperor of Outworld, Kotal Kahn. His Variant Styles change up how he uses his powers, either for fast and intense combos, or to place traps and control the battlefield.

The last two confirmed veterans are the demon Quan Chi and the fan-favourite four-fisted Goro. Quan Chi's gameplay style is focused around sneaky-play and controlling the fight through unpredictable tactics. One variation of his style sees him summoning a giant demonic bat to fight alongside him, while another lets him freely use portals in a way that would make GLaDOS proud.

As for Goro, our favourite Shokan warrior is only available through pre-order. And besides his



“...25 years into the future, introducing a new generation of fighters, among them the daughter of Johnny Cage and Sonya Blade named Cassie Cage.”

announcement, nothing else has been shown yet of his fighting style. We can only speculate that he will be a handful... [Oh you! Ed]

With twelve other characters still to be announced, it's a fair bet that we will see many more old faces. Given that *MK X* takes place 25 years after *MK9*, it will be interesting to see how the mortal characters, like Liu Kang or Kung Lao, have aged.

INSERT COIN

Details on the plot are sketchy at this point in time, but we can confirm that it takes place shortly after the previous game's conclusion. It also looks set to traverse itself 25 years into the future, introducing a new generation of fighters, among them the daughter of Johnny Cage and Sonya Blade named Cassie Cage. Perhaps the most interesting new twist is that the game's iconic Outworld now has a new ruler named Kotal Kahn. Unlike the 2011 game, *Mortal Kombat X* will be a new, original story instead of a retelling of the franchise's history.

A NEW CHALLENGER APPROACHES!

Mortal Kombat X promises to introduce more new fighters than any of the previous games in the series. We already mentioned the lovechild of a Sonya Blade/Johnny Cage union, and this will be accented by the addition of D'Vorah; a female clad in monk-like robes and modelled on the theme of bees and venom. Her attacks consist of the use of stings and assorted insect appendages.

We'll also be treated to a dual-character in the form of Ferra and Torr: a small woman riding on the back of a large, masked brute. Ferra, the female, looks set to attack her opponents with claws whilst Torr appears to be the unrestrained muscle of the alliance.

The aforementioned Kotal Kahn is clearly modelled on Aztec sensibilities, and bears more than a passing resemblance to the historical Montezuma. He's a god and his particular alignment will be at the player's choosing, be it a deity of the sun, war or



A HISTORY OF MORTAL KOMBAT

The first *Mortal Kombat* is, without exaggeration, one of the most important games of all time.

When it burst, throbbing, from the chest of the video game industry in 1992, it cemented the fighting game genre as a behemoth of the medium, introduced a number of firsts and challenged long-standing taboos on what was deemed acceptable in video games.

Created by John Tobias and Ed Boon (the latter has remained with the series throughout its 22-year life) of Midway Games, its realistic digitised actors, copious blood and gruesome Fatalities invoked controversy and the wrath of the US congress at the time; the moral panic was directly responsible for the formation of the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) in 1994.

Gamers, however, loved it. *MK's* gritty theme and tone, inspired by martial arts flicks, was a stark contrast to most games' then cartoony facade.

MK II followed a year later to critical acclaim. Considered by many to be the best in the series' lineage, *MK II* remains the quintessential example of the series' appeal, incorporating fan feedback, interactive stages, plethora content and numerous Easter eggs.

Midway, now riding a multimedia empire spanning numerous ports, comics, TV shows and a (surprisingly decent) movie, would close off *MK's* golden era with *MK III* in 1995. While technically superior, its complex combo system and revised character roster (which lacked favourites like Scorpion) left many players dubious of its continued relevance.

Thereafter, *MK* struggled to redefine itself for a modern audience: *MK IV* moved to 3D in 1997 but seemed quaint compared to the likes of *Soul Calibur*. *Mythologies: Sub-Zero* leveraged off the universe with a more story-orientated platformer largely panned by critics; and *Special Forces*, a 2000 3D action game starring Jax Briggs became immortalised as the franchise's worst title.

Midway tried to return to the series' roots with some success (with games like *Deadly Alliance* reinvigorating the series), but lacklustre performance finally resulted in Midway filing for bankruptcy in 2009 shortly after the release of their crossover *Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe*.

MK may have faded into ignominy if not for the exceptional reboot by NetherRealm Studios in 2011. Simply titled *Mortal Kombat*, the game retconned the original trilogy while hearkening back to the franchises propensity for over-the-top violence and ridiculous plots. Combined with a tight fighting system, it ensured the franchise would get a Round 2 with a new generation of gamers.

- **AlmostAHero**



blood. He also supports an impressive array of tattoos on his upper body, and the colour of these will reflect his particular position.

With the exception of Cassie Cage, all these new characters appear to be somewhat dark and foreboding, and we can assume they'll likely be on the side of evil.

SELECT YOUR ARENA

Much like the story, the actual number of stages remains a mystery, but a handful of the playable arenas have been demonstrated in the game's various showings. They include The Kove, a shipping port in the ancient Japanese style which is seemingly besieged by a persistent storm and sentient rocks.

Then we have the Jungle, which appears to be Kotal Kahn's domain and a fitting match for his Aztec theming. It's a lush, tropical arena that seems to be situated in a shallow river bed on a jungle crossing.

There's also the Outworld Marketplace, clearly taking its influence from a mixture of medieval and middle-eastern settings to show us the more mundane aspects of everyday life in that otherwise mystical realm. Strange beasts and non-human

creatures lurk in the background and watch as the fighters duke it out.

Finally, we have the Snow Forest which featured prominently in the game's announcement trailer. It looks as if it's similar to the infamous Living Forest that made its debut in *Mortal Kombat II*, complete with a dark and sinister theme and the likelihood of being haunted. It's entirely possible that tree limbs may be used as a defence or an attack.

This next *Mortal Kombat* certainly looks like it's got a lot going for it, and NetherRealm have proved that they're not afraid to make the changes that they deem necessary. Between the variant fighting styles, interactive environments, and even the introduction of a character as narratively-significant as Cassie Cage, there's plenty to be excited about. **NAG**

- **Sand Storm & Delano**



PLATFORM / PC

REVIEWED ON / PC

GENRE / Roguelike / tower defense

DEVELOPER / Amplitude Studios

AGE RATING / 12

MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > None

PUBLISHER / Amplitude Studios

WEBSITE / www.amplitude-studios.com

DISTRIBUTOR / Digital (Steam)

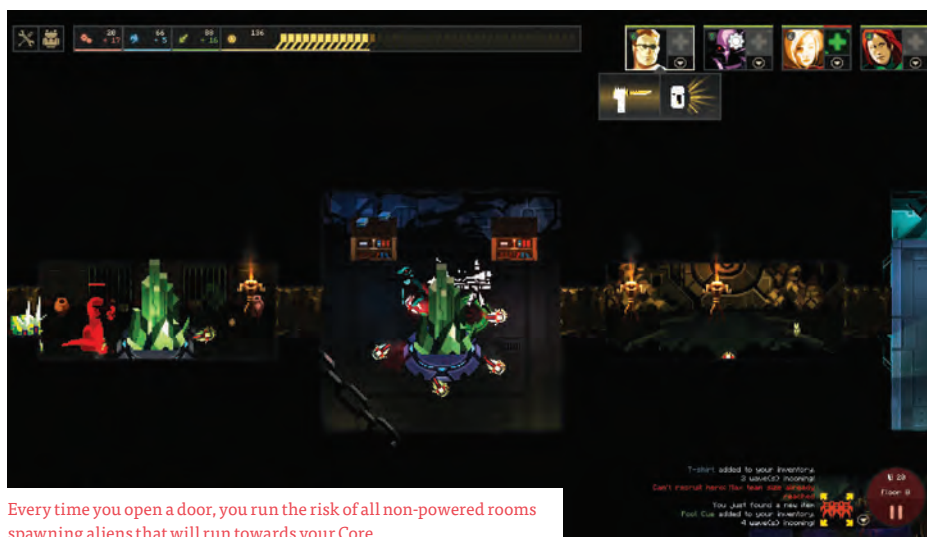
Dungeon of the Endless

No room to run, no room to hide

Games can teach us many things. This game teaches us that if we're ever marooned on an alien planet after our spaceship crash-lands there, you should definitely open every door you can find. It might kill you, since there are *obviously* aliens behind the doors that want to eat you. But if you don't open doors, you can't progress. Deep, right?

Doors of the Endless is a great game, with a very refined core concept. You use your rag-tag band of heroes (up to four) to open doors and reveal rooms. If there are bad things in the room, the heroes will automatically engage and fight. You can assist by healing them or triggering their special skills, which get better

as you level them up. Each time you open a door, you gain resources – making the act of opening a portcullis much like taking a turn in a strategy game. The amount of resources you gain is determined by what generators you've built in the rooms that can support them. There are three: Industry lets you build turrets and more generators; Science lets you research upgrades; Food lets you heal and level your heroes. As you reveal rooms, you also gain Power which lets you power rooms, toggling them on and off as you see fit. An unpowered is dark, turrets built there won't work, and worst of all, aliens might spawn there the next time you open a door. Once you've found the exit, you need to go back to



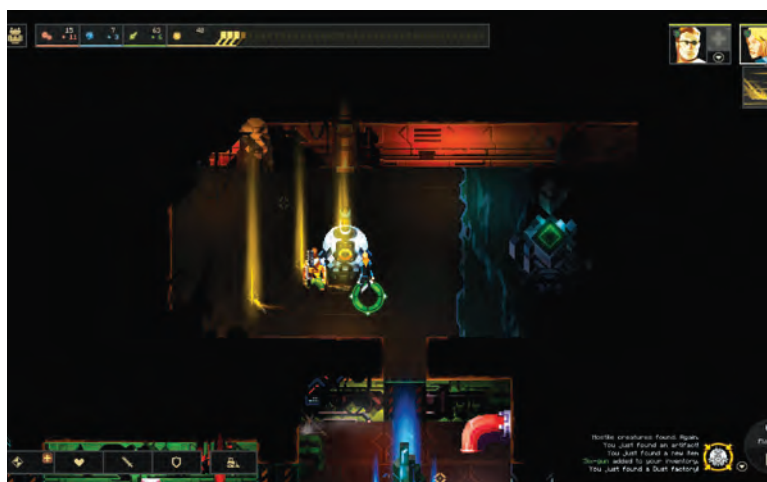
Every time you open a door, you run the risk of all non-powered rooms spawning aliens that will run towards your Core.

your ship, pick up the power core, and escort it to the exit. Aliens will spawn non-stop until you either escape, or die. If you make it, you go up to a new randomly-generated floor, things get harder, but you might uncover new things like heroes that unlock for the next time you play.

Like *Rogue Legacy*, *Spelunky*, *Binding of Isaac* and other games in this style, the main draw of *Dungeon of the Endless* is to play the game enough until you discover little tricks and techniques that are reliable. Using those techniques, you get further in, unlock more content, and push on until you hit your limit (or the random-generator just decides to screw you over with a no-win situation, which is always possible). There's great fun in using a game as a *game*, and *Dungeon of the Endless* has plenty of game with which to play.

Incidentally, *Dungeon of the Endless* takes place in the expanded universe of the studio's other games, *Endless Legend* (a great fantasy 4X game in the vein of *Civilization*) and *Endless Space* (a *Master of Orion* style sci-fi 4X). **NAG**

- Miktar



During levels, little scenes may play out on the elevator depending on the characters you have. Prepare for unforeseen consequences.

81

Like other games in this genre of "randomly generated levels + permadeath", *Dungeon of the Endless* is all about the "run". You load it up, see how far you get, unlock a few things, die, and try again. The moody sci-fi atmosphere and interesting mechanics really set this one apart.

PLUS / Lots of content / Oddly engrossing / Slick visuals

MINUS / Can be unfair / Slight interface bugs

Reviews *Intro*

Time is nobody's ally, but you'd think by the weary tones that this year had at least an extra dozen months in it. Oh woe is the NAG reviewer, we hope you take it easy over the holidays...

Question / What *don't* you want for Christmas?



DANE "BARKSKIN" REMENDES

Rabies, mostly. Also, I'd really like to not get hit by cars, because I hear that's just the worst. Also also, if I find a chubby, bearded old dude trapped in my braai chimney again, I'm exiting this planet.

CURRENTLY PLAYING

Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor, The Evil Within, Far Cry 3, Mark of the Ninja



DELANO "DELANO" CUZZUCOLI

I don't want thousands of thundering typhoons or billions of blistering blue barnacles.

CURRENTLY PLAYING

Insurgency



GEOFF "GEOMETRIX" BURROWS

Access to email, family drama, or any concept of time.

CURRENTLY PLAYING

CoD: Advanced Warfare, Dragon Age: Inquisition, OS Repair Simulator 2014



MATT "SAND_STORM" FICK

Ebola. Too soon? Too soon...

CURRENTLY PLAYING

Hearthstone, Destiny, Shadow of Mordor

▶ *mini review*

Metro Redux

dragged out of the scorched rubble of cult-popular post-apocalyptic survival series *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* and the subsequent closure of developer GSC Game World, 2010's *Metro 2033* was a sort of real-life post-apocalyptic survivor all on its own. Developed by 4A Games, a studio made up almost entirely of former GSC employees, the game was a megaton hit both critically and commercially, and a sequel – *Metro: Last Light* – dropped three years later.

The *Metro* series is set in an alternate (but maybe not entirely improbable) future where the world has been mostly destroyed in a nuclear holocaust, and played from the perspective of Artyom, a human survivor who lives underground in the Moscow subway system. SPOILERS: Surface radiation isn't the only problem

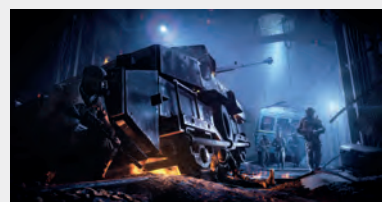


anymore, or even the biggest.

Simply, *Metro Redux* bundles HD-remastered versions of *Metro 2033* and *Metro: Last Light*, plus the sequel's four DLC add-ons, in a single compilation for PC, PS4, and Xbox

One. Some of the gameplay mechanics introduced in *Metro: Last Light* – weapon mods, for example, and the HUD-free Ranger mode – have also been retro-fitted to *Metro 2033*. **NAG**

- Azimuth



76 Relentlessly bleak and uncompromisingly difficult, but that's probably what a real nuclear holocaust would be like anyway.

HEARD AT THE OFFICE...

“SAVAGE, please take that camera off your desk; it’s freaking me out.”
- Geoff



MICHAEL “RETTIDE” JAMES
I don’t want Reggae for Christmas or any meal that involves that horrible duck, turkey, chicken combination – the Turducken.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Terraria



MIKLOS “MIKITO707” SZECSEI
I don’t want to have to work over Christmas.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
CoD: Advanced Warfare, Alien: Isolation, AC Unity



MIKTAR “MIKTAR” DRACON
Three feet of snow per day. Frozen water pipes. Internet outage.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Guild Wars 2, Fantasy Life, Bayonetta 2, Drive Club



SARAH “BELLUM” BROWNE
Christmas carols by Neil Diamond or Mariah Carey anywhere near my ears. Or undercooked roast potatoes. Worst.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
Pokemon Y, Starcraft II, Thief



TARRYN “AZIMUTH” VAN DER BYL
Cat vomit on the carpet. JUST ONE DAY OF THE YEAR, PLEASE.

CURRENTLY PLAYING
CoD: Advanced Warfare, Halo: The Master Chief Collection, Alien: Isolation, Sunset Overdrive

▶ mini review

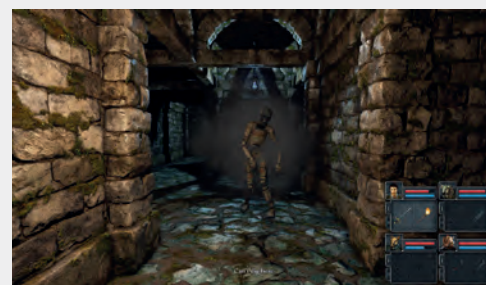
Legend of Grimrock II

Legend of *Grimrock II* expands on the original game with an exciting change of scenery and heaps of new monsters, loot, dungeons and puzzles. The game is a classically-styled RPG dungeon crawler that gives older games, like *Dungeon Master*, a fresh coat of modern gaming gloss and thinking.

You find yourself shipwrecked on an island and, along with your three adventuring companions, must figure out the where, what, how and why. Narratively, it’s not deep or compelling stuff, but the game has a unique way of telling the tale through letters and clues in the game world. The sequel takes place both above and below ground and the new outside areas freshen the experience considerably. Going underground now doesn’t feel so oppressive when you know there’s a chance you’ll be back outside soon – the original game was dreadfully gloomy, but in a good way of course.



There are new monsters and character class options as well as firearms now and all the usual satisfyingly annoying puzzles, tricks and secrets. *Legend of Grimrock II* also ships with a dungeon editor that makes putting together your own adventures as easy as skinning a leprechaun [*Is that easy? Ed*]. With the



game’s extensive online community, players can expect to see many hours of fresh adventures created in the future. Just a side note here, if you look in the game’s extras directory you’ll find printer friendly graph paper for those of you that prefer your dungeon crawling old school. **NAG**

- RedTide

86

It’s a flawless sequel to an already excellent gaming experience and deserves your attention.

PLATFORMS / XBO

REVIEWED ON / XBO

GENRE / Third-person shooter

DEVELOPER / Insomniac Games

AGE RATING / 16

MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > 8

PUBLISHER / Microsoft Studios

WEBSITE / insomniacgames.com

DISTRIBUTOR / Prima Interactive



Sunset Overdrive

Awesomepocalypse now

It is 2027. It is the post-apocalypse. I mean, obviously, because in video games, the future is always the post-apocalypse. It's the rules or something. Anyway, in this otherwise redundant future post-apocalypse, the world is (or technically was, but also kind of still is) controlled by FizzCo, a food and beverage megacorporation whose latest must-have product, an energy drink called OverCharge Delirium XT that's "guaranteed to unlock your wasted potential", has turned everybody who drank it into mutant monsters, because of course it has. I'm sure that's some sort of subtle metaphor about capitalism and consumerism and the subdeconstructivist paradigm of consensus – or not – but the point is, it's now up to you, mega-ultra-heroic... janitor, to save the world. Or Sunset City, for now. The world can wait until the inevitable sequel.

Sunset Overdrive is a mad mashup of a bunch of things, perhaps most prominently

including *Tony Hawk's Project 8*, *Saints Row*, and a psychedelic hallucination made up almost entirely of brightly coloured-in Memebase gags, gratuitous swears, and self-referential parody. It's zany, hilarious, brilliantly stupid – or, maybe, stupidly brilliant – and definitely some of the most fun I've had this whole year. This is the game I never knew I'd always wanted to play, and a razzle-dazzle respite from the gritty, grimy, 50 shades of grey of previous future post-apocalypses.

The single-player campaign's premise is simple enough – get out of Sunset City alive. Easier said than done (by approximately 20 hours or so), but being dead isn't exactly a major obstacle either because you'll come back to life instantly with zero penalty, and the respawn animations – comprising loads of pop culture references from *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure* and *Terminator 2* to *Star Trek*, *The Grudge*, and even *Portal* – make up

UNLOCKING YOUR... OTHER POTENTIAL

Doing pretty much anything in *Sunset Overdrive* counts towards a multitude of XP tickers – using a particular weapon a lot will rank it up, for example, and all weapons and traversal manoeuvres – grinds, wall-runs, air dashes, bounces, and everything else in between – also feature unlockable modifiers, or "Badges". These work a bit like Amps, in that you can choose to add Badges to six "Overdrive" slots for boosts and bonuses, but unlike Amps they're always active. Your Badges can also level up, and Overdrive loadouts can be customised to create a character that plays according to your own unique preferences and/or contingent circumstances.





some of the game's coolest moments. *Sunset Overdrive* is not a hard game by any means, and relies instead on maintaining an increasingly absurd plot-loop of go-here, do-this, with a supporting cast of appropriately eccentric weirdoes and a murderous balloon with lasers for eyes. This is real deal "sandbox gaming", where you can shut out the tedious humdrum of grownup reality and pretend you're a potty-mouthed 10-year old with an infinite supply of grubby action figures, spraypaint, and antisocial tendencies. And your sandbox is laced with military-grade narcotics.

Early on, you learn that slogging it on foot is an exceedingly bad idea – and not just because grinding power lines, wall-running, air dashing, and bouncing off industrial fans looks way more rad. Hanging around on the ground is an open invitation to the swarms of mutants already cramming Sunset City's streets, and even a TNTeddy blast at point-blank range isn't much of a deterrent to the monsters stepping in what's left of their former comrades. Instead, *Sunset Overdrive* swaps out standard, check-your-corners urban warfare for an open world game of "the floor is lava", and just to keep things interesting, grinding and bouncing dials up your Style Meter to unlock temporary ability and gear boosts via slotted Amps. Amps? Amps! They're these... things that you get by completing

missions or cashing in collectibles, and can be equipped in several different slots for extra special effects. The "Burn, Baby" weapon Amp, for example, has a chance of igniting enemies around you, and the "Roid Rage" melee Amp causes enemies to explode when you hit them. Some of the more exotic Amps can only be purchased with specific collectibles, like toilet paper – hey, toilet paper is useful even at the end of everything – and picking up enough of this stuff to trade in can be a bit of a chore. **NAG**

- Azimuth

88 *It's the end of the world as we know it, and LOOK MOM, I'M GRINDING ON TOP OF IT! Uncompromisingly unconventional and irreverently irresistible, *Sunset Overdrive* is the hot new hero of the next generation, and a mandatory buy on Xbox One.*

PLUS / All the LOLs / Exploding teddy bears / Unexpectedly decent multiplayer

MINUS / Overwhelming number of collectibles / No difficulty scaling in multiplayer

FUN WITH NUMBERS

Next to the single-player campaign, *Sunset Overdrive* also features some rather excellent multiplayer with Chaos Squad. Up to eight people can chum up and rock out in a randomised, grab bag series of objective-based missions somewhat similar to the campaign missions, but with more enemies. Heaps more enemies. In fact, even attempting to play this mode with less than four players is basically suicide, sooner or later – but almost definitely sooner – because there's no difficulty scaling according to the number of people in the game. Although this is somewhat mitigated by no significant forfeit for failure besides embarrassment, it does mean people with no friends are missing out. But then, they'd miss out in a real apocalypse, anyway, so maybe it's like a public service announcement or something. Get friends, everybody, or you're going to have a bad time.

The Evil Within

That's not how you're meant to use barbed wire, buddy

I hated *The Evil Within* at first. It really doesn't make a great first impression. Or even a great second or third one. During the very first playable scene in the game – in other words, that all-important moment when you're first handed control of protagonist Sebastian Castellanos – the thing jitters and shudders, its frame rate very noticeably dipping below acceptable levels, even though there's barely anything happening on-screen. To make matters worse, about a third of the available screen space is cut off by a pair of thick black borders (one top, one bottom) that squish the viewable area into an awful letterbox aspect ratio. I'm sure someone thought this was a great way to enhance the atmosphere, or perhaps it's used as a means to keep the game's occasionally dismal performance up by artificially limiting the resolution, but whatever the reasoning behind it, it's a shocking design move. Fortunately there's been a patch released since (on PC, at least) that allows the option to remove the bars, but the idea that they exist at all is deeply offensive. To me at least. Die-hard fans will

vehemently defend the genius of those black bars until they're blue in the face, but I didn't spend obscene amounts of money on my television just to have a third of it declared a no-go zone.

So yes – not the best start for *The Evil Within* and I. It's no help that from the offset the narrative flow is completely bonkers, offering hardly any explanation as to who these people are and why I'm with them and oh wait I think I'm a police officer and why is everyone in this hospital dead surely this is where people go to be not-dead oh NO what is wrong with that guy's FACE?! The story eventually begins making more sense once you're beyond the game's halfway mark and you can start piecing things together, but mostly it's just a procession of disappointingly boring characters spouting nonsense about nonsensical things in between the parts where your cheekbone is being chomped on by repulsive monsters. Actually, I'm pretty sure there's a deceptively ambitious, unexpectedly thoughtful plot hidden somewhere in the rubble, but it never fully surfaces, instead



I SEE WHAT YOU DID THERE

Many wonderful quirks have made their way into the game's mechanics. At first, some are slightly off-putting – but later, as you come to appreciate their purpose and the fact that the game's stringent set of rules ties nicely into the narrative, you'll find their inclusion plenty meaningful. Enemies who are downed by your shots often aren't *really* dead, and must be set alight with a match to ensure their demise. Nearby enemies can also be caught in the small blaze, so dead/downed bodies actually become a commodity and you'll eventually learn that a well-timed match drop can conserve loads of ammo by insta-killing multiple foes. Small hand axes dish out one-hit kills – but they perish after a single use. Your sprint ability is hilariously limited (before upgrading it, at least), allowing for a pathetically short dash before you have to literally stop and catch your breath, unable to move. You'll find other curious mechanics in the game, some highly inventive, others initially stifling – but most suit the game perfectly.



Fatter enemies have more health than thinner ones. I'm not sure how to feel about that, but it sure does make you pay attention whenever there's a chunky foe in the room.





preferring to hide behind an endless stream of demented imagery and tireless tension.

Here's the thing though: the unpredictability of the plot bleeds into the actual gameplay, and that unpredictability is part of what makes *The Evil Within* such an attractive modern survival horror outing. If you've been following the game's development at all, you'll know that Shinji Mikami, the original creator of *Resident Evil* (he also directed development of *Resident Evil 4*) and who helped produce some of Capcom's best-loved works (*Devil May Cry* and *Viewtiful Joe*, anyone?), is credited as director of *The Evil Within*. And it shows. The pacing is meticulous, crafted by a team that knows when, how and for what length of time to keep the player on edge. Give the player a security blanket to hold for a few moments, cultivate a false sense of security and then set the blanket – and the player's heart – on fire. Tying directly into the narrative, the unsettling environments are never quite what they seem and can suddenly shift from an abandoned hospital to dark, dank catacombs without a moment's notice.

It's far from the most frightening game out there, often relying on jump scares to jolt your adrenal glands – but it's fantastic at sustaining tension and generating general

unease via careful use of audio, jarring visual effects, clever lighting and obscure camera angles. Music explodes into action during appropriately explosive moments, and the sound effects serve up an assortment of bloody squelches, sudden metallic scratches and bloodcurdling moans. For the majority of the time, however, *The Evil Within* is more *Dead Space* than *Silent Hill*, more action game than horrific thriller. There's a range of weapons to find and employ against the various enemy types, and ammunition is scarce enough that there'll be times when you'll stare at your inventory and wonder how in the nine hells you'll survive your next encounter with just the breadcrumbs and bent paperclip you have left in your pockets. Early on in the game, stealth is your greatest ally, letting you sneak up behind enemies and knife them for instant kills, while hiding under beds and in cupboards lets you avoid curious beasts – but the stealthy approach is quickly rendered useless as you advance deeper into the game's chapters.

Along the way you'll collect a resource that lets you upgrade Sebastian's capabilities and weapons, raising your health limit or damage output, and increasing the amount of ammo, matches and syringes you can carry. The game's variety of horrific bosses are sure to stick in your mind well after the credits roll, but encounters with them usually follow the same pattern – first you're forced to run, later you're required to fend them off in a confined space while simultaneously attempting to perform some important task. Nevertheless, boss encounters are always harrowing, despite the fact that the strings pulling them are in clear view. Annoyingly, much of the game is plagued by fussy controls, which make lining up interactions (especially in the midst of combat) often needlessly frustrating, particularly when it results in yet another death animation or a huge chunk shaved off your dwindling health bar. **NAG**

- Barksin



Levels are littered with an array of horrible traps. They can be dismantled if you're careful, and rewards you with parts used to create ammo for your Agony Crossbow.



80 It's afflicted by a handful of frustrating flaws, some by design, others hopefully accidental, but *The Evil Within* is nonetheless a slick action/horror experience. Parts of it are truly memorable, and while its many odd mechanics are guaranteed to prove hugely divisive, I found it to be a challenging, rewarding journey through the minds of some demented game designers.

PLUS / Horrific environments and enemies / Unpredictable pacing / Brilliantly challenging at times

MINUS / Inane story / Boring characters / Some really iffy design choices / Technical fumbles

PLATFORMS / PC

REVIEWED ON / PC

GENRE / Turn-based strategy

DEVELOPER / Firaxis Games

AGE RATING / 12

MULTIPLAYER / Local > 8 players Online > 8 players

PUBLISHER / 2K

WEBSITE / www.civilization.com

DISTRIBUTOR / Megarom

Sid Meier's Civilization: Beyond Earth

Eh, okay, one more turn...

Once upon a time there was a game called *Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri*. On the surface it looked like a reskinned version of *Civilization II*, but once you peeled back a few layers and dug inside, it became obvious that it contained narrative and gameplay depth that *Civ* hadn't touched. *Sid Meier's Civilization: Beyond Earth* is almost like that, and many have called it the spiritual sequel to *Alpha Centauri* because of this, but in truth it's neither as special as its spiritual precursor nor as deep as the game that it's based on, *Civilization V*.

Now that we've handled what *Beyond Earth* isn't, here's what it is: a spin-off from the *Civilization* series, developed by a new team within Firaxis Games, that's designed to offer players a more narrative and objective-driven experience than what the sandbox nature of *Civ* encourages. The setting is 2060: Earth is done for, it's exhausted and everybody who can is leaving in search of a new home planet, which is where *Beyond Earth* takes place. Instead of playing as a preset civilisation,



Neutral aliens roam the landscapes of your new home and can be a nightmare to deal with at first. They're far more challenging than *Civ*'s old barbarians, but this at least keeps the early game interesting and forces you to start making big decisions right from the start.



you'll take on the role of the leader of a group of colonists, customised from a selection of corporate and cultural sponsors, types of colonists, starting resources and a few other bits. But where the civilisations of *Civ* are highly diverse initially and tend towards similarity as the game goes on, *Beyond Earth* flips that on its head: the differences in colonies are small and subtle at first, but as they research new technologies and follow one of three affinities, they become more and more individual.

Affinities are the main driving force in *Beyond Earth*. Everything comes back to them in some way. Harmony, Purity and Supremacy (respectively: becoming one with the planet, staying true to humanity, or rising above everything and everyone) represent an ideal that ties into research, warfare and diplomacy. This has the effect of treading on everything you might already know about playing a game of *Civilization*, and it's here where the differences are most obvious. Where *Civ* left you alone for the most part to go about your business of winning the space race, being voted International BFF, or killing everyone who shares the planet with you, *Beyond Earth* has five possible victory conditions: one for each affinity, one for domination, and another

best left as a mystery. This means you have to keep an eye on a lot more than usual, often turning your attention away from your typical *modus operandi* and sometimes trying to play catch-up to other colonies that have snuck in a Wonder, or following a quest chain that gets assigned to you as you play. Or you can ignore every other entity on the map (except for the neutral aliens) and gun straight for your own victory condition.

This is all done in the name of storytelling: each game of *Beyond Earth* has far more character and purpose than those of *Civ*. Colonies go about their business according to their affinities, and you're forced to play along. As long as you understand what you're in for with *Beyond Earth*, this far more channelled experience makes for a good time, but if you're expecting classic *Civ*, then you might find the narrative stuff a bit over-bearing and possibly even irritating.

An extra nod in the direction of narrative-driven over sandbox comes in the form of small decisions that you're required to make during each game. Whenever you build a new structure for the first time, you'll be prompted with a little story about how your people could use this new technology for one purpose or the other. The results of these decisions could



Certain units can be deployed to the new orbital layer, which provides a bit of extra tactical depth to help make up for the somewhat simplified military combat that's on tap here.



slightly increase productivity, health, energy, etc. by a small margin, or provide other small benefits of having those buildings in your cities. These and other slightly more involved “quest” decisions pop up frequently during a game, and while they try to give flavour and meaning to your search for a new home for humanity, they ultimately feel ineffective and undersold, neither giving sufficient weight to this new approach to *Civ* nor staying out of your way enough to let you get on with things.

The one place where *Beyond Earth* does step far beyond the comfort zone (and does so successfully) is in its approach to tech trees and research. Instead of offering the player a mostly linear experience with a few obvious key techs along the way, you'll have to explore the Tech Web – an expansive set of branch and leaf technologies that is almost impossible to conquer 100%. You'll have to make important choices along the way, right from the beginning, of which technologies are worth pursuing. This can be frustrating at first, but once you're familiar with the system you'll likely appreciate it for the variety that it lends the game.

The Tech Web is great, but navigating it, and indeed navigating almost every part of the game, is a painful experience, even once

you've spent many hours with the game. The user interface is sluggish, ugly and very often unintuitive, even for *Civ* veterans. It's clear that Firaxis rushed through this last leg and that's a pity, as any game of this nature is quickly sold short by a sloppy interface. Thankfully there are some modders out there working on fixes while we wait for official relief. **NAG**

- GeometriX

79 *Beyond Earth is flawed, but not entirely ill-conceived. There's so much that wants to be loved but it's difficult to look past some of the core issues at play here. Definitely one for sci-fi enthusiasts, but those looking for the next Civ experience might have a hard time settling in.*

PLUS / Interesting setting and lore / Tech Web is great / Looks pretty good

MINUS / Shoddy UI / Narrative content is lacking / Feels incomplete

PLATFORMS / 360 / PC / PS3 / PS4 / XBO

REVIEWED ON / PC

GENRE / First-person shooter

DEVELOPER / Sledgehammer Games

AGE RATING / 18

MULTIPLAYER / Local > 2 players Online > 18 players

PUBLISHER / Activision

WEBSITE / www.callofduty.com

DISTRIBUTOR / Megarom

Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare

Might as well jump. Jump! Go ahead, jump.

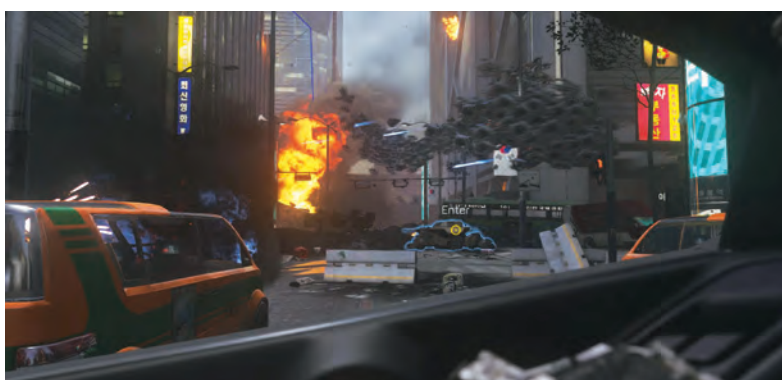
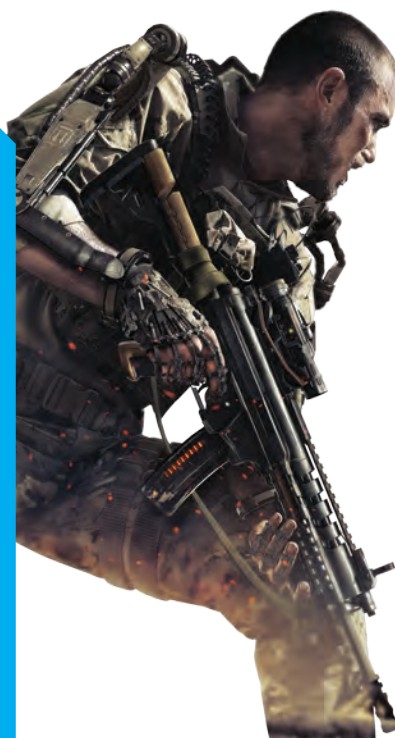
So we all know that everyone is going to be blasting through the single player game in hours and then spending the next year playing the multiplayer. Of course some of you will probably only have a look at the single-player campaign one night next year after you rage quit because some n00b online did a thing. This thinking is representative of the review before you. Most of the focus is on the multiplayer and less on the single-player. Having said that we strongly urge you to play the single-player game because it's one hell of a ride into what can only be called mega blockbuster gaming the likes of which we only ever see in popcorn stuffing Michael Bay movies.

EXO-TIC

The Exoskeleton suits are a great start for this frantic run-and-gun multiplayer reinvention of the series. All we need now are a few jump

pads scattered around the maps and a railgun and maybe even a quick-firing rocket launcher. Just saying, make a note for next time. For those of you coming away from the disaster that was *Call of Duty: Ghosts* it's all good news. *CoD* is back and futuristic and awesome and feels just like *Modern Warfare 2* and also a little like *Black Ops II*. What I don't like is the rubbish network code on launch. There are issues that, depending on luck or the weather or your connection, mean you either do well or excellent or terrible. I know they'll fix all this soon but right now it grates a lot.

The old Pick 10 system has been reworked to Pick 13, which means you fully customise your loadout however you'd like (it's more than the usual 10 thanks to the Exo suit stuff). For example, you can choose up to three add-ons for your gun meaning you can't choose an extra perk in slot one and so on. The permutations are varied and deep, allowing



GEOMETRIX'S MULTIPLAYER OPINION

Advanced Warfare's multiplayer component is a very satisfying offering. While I can't comment on anything but team deathmatch, because it's impossible to find a game in any other mode (although I've heard great things from console gamers... sigh), that one mode offers so much enjoyment that it's almost worth putting up with the P2P issues, lag spikes and disconnects. Thankfully there have been a couple of patches already which have done a lot to fix those issues.

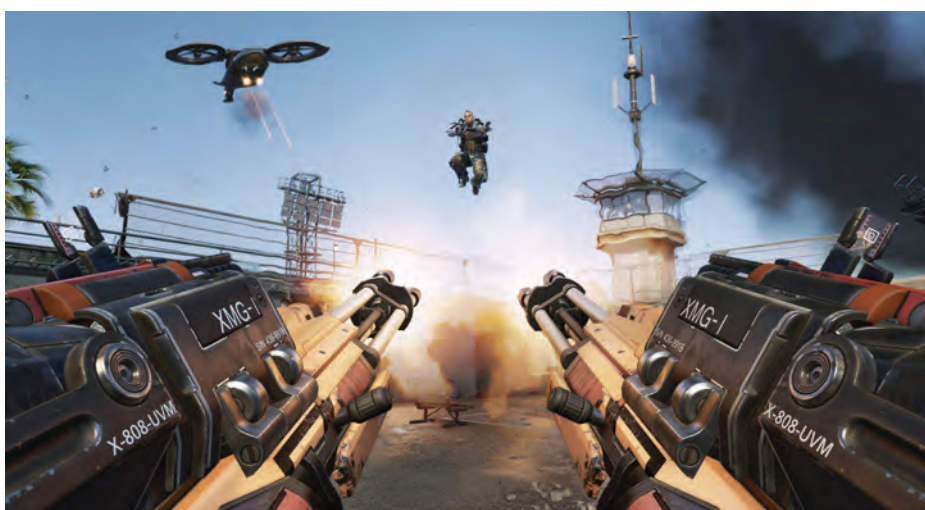
As for the game itself, it's great fun. The guns feel meaty and the action has real weight to it. Moving through the well-designed (and reasonably-sized!) maps while blasting Exo abilities in all directions is incredibly satisfying. The movement is fast and takes a lot of practice to get right, but it's worth trying ten times to land that perfect jump, even if you get shot out of the sky every second attempt. And once you've got the motion figured out, watching other players helplessly bat themselves into walls like Christmas beetles just adds to the thrill of the whole experience.

TARRYN'S MULTIPLAYER OPINION

Although some* gamers are largely unaware of the existence of game types that aren't team deathmatch, *Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare* actually includes more than 10 multiplayer modes, plus several additional variants of these, as well as a revamped co-op survival mode. Where previous *Call of Duty* games have reliably delivered more or less the same but... no, it's basically exactly the same thing every year, *Advanced Warfare*'s sci-fi Exoskeleton has introduced a fundamentally and entirely different kind of gameplay to the series, with a definitively old school aesthetic – it's much more *Unreal Tournament* than military sniper sim. WICKED SICK.

New features like double-jump, air dash, and the glorious boost slam make for much faster, infinitely more engaged matches where camping in a corner is a first-class ticket to the bottom of the scoreboard.

At the moment, there's no dedicated server support for the game on PC (controversial) or console (not quite so controversial), but I've had no real issue with lag or peer-to-peer matchmaking on Xbox One. Sledgehammer has maintained a somewhat vague position on when/if/what dedicated server support is incoming, but PC gamers' grumbles are getting louder. Stay tuned.



for everything from a ghost knifing class to a sit-and-camp sniping class, there's something here for everyone. The default classes are also great for when you start and it's a testament to the polish and familiarity of the multiplayer that you can grab an SMG default setup and still dominate a match on your first go. This is what it means to get multiplayer right: being able to jump in, having played most of the previous games in the series, and just slot right into a comfortable space.

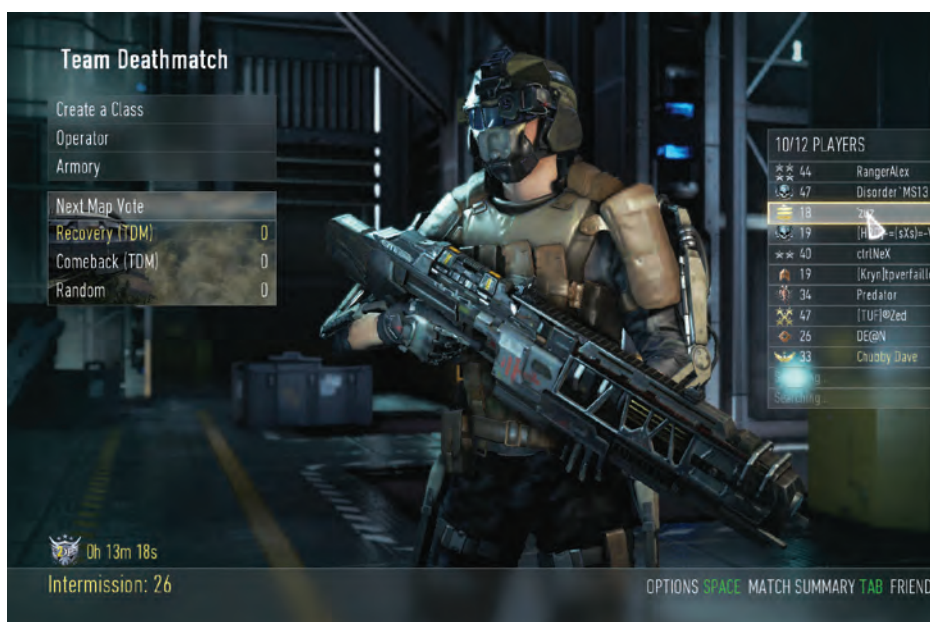
The suits allow for more vertical mobility in the maps and it's a real art learning how to use them effectively. They also leave a trace signature on the mini-map so you need to think about the where and how when using them. All this leaping up and dodging in mid-air also opens up opportunities to skeet shoot enemies or simply leap up and stomp people to death. It's a great addition but comes at the cost of having no really small maps. To make up for it a little, all the maps feature some dynamic content. For example, new areas of the map are dropped off by a cargo chopper and in others a tsunami pounds the coastline. They don't really change things too much but are a fun distraction.

On the topic of game modes, if South African PC-based CoD players ever bother to

look there are a few other interesting maps modes to play outside of TDM and S&D, like Uplink and the welcome return of Hardpoint. So go on, have a look, you might even like what you find. Also, you can select game modes that turn off the Exo suits. So yes, Sledgehammer Games have done it, they've cleared the stench of *Call of Duty: Ghosts* and convincingly set the way forward for the series and hopefully the thinking behind future iterations. But no, it's not magically different to what you're used to, in fact it's just like all the other games that have come before it – which is not a bad thing. What it does is offer a glimpse that the people at Activision are thinking about series fatigue and taking small steps to correct this now.

EXO SURVIVAL: ALL FOR ONE AND ONE FOR ALL

But wait there's more. There's another mode on offer here call Exo Survival which is a co-op experience for up to four players. It's wave-based but instead of zombies or aliens



GUARDI3N'S MULTIPLAYER OPINION

YELLOW - Time spent searching for a game
PURPLE - Time spent looking for any other mode to play except for TDM

RED - Time spent relaunching Steam after map fails to load

BLUE - Time spent in a game actually playing

Sorry that I had to go all pie-chart on you people, but they say a picture is worth a thousand words. And, if I'm being entirely honest, I don't really have time to write a thousand words. Mind you, I don't exactly need a thousand words to tell you that, despite my yellow/purple/red pie-chart grumbings above, my "blue time" is the most fun I've had playing a *Call of Duty* game since *Modern Warfare 2* and *Black Ops 1*. There is SO much to love about *Advanced Warfare* in multiplayer mode. The maps are sublime, the audio and gun sounds are enchanting, and the purple knee pads and purple gloves that you get in the supply drops are splendiferous. Oh, and the dynamics that the Exosuit adds to the environment are compelling and often end up in some hilariously chaotic gun fights and fist punch battles. Sledgehammer Games has successfully sated my appetite for killing people online. I'm officially a fan, and this game is a must-play.

GEOMETRIX'S CAMPAIGN IMPRESSIONS

It'd be false of me to say that I haven't enjoyed a *CoD* single-player campaign this much in a long time, because I've never enjoyed a *CoD* single-player campaign this much.

All of the fancy tech and future stuff you see dotted around these pages is given context in *Advanced Warfare's* campaign, which takes place in the year 2054. It's a future in which the roles of government-operated armies have been made nearly redundant thanks to the rise of a new global superpower, the private corporation Atlas, with its giant army of machine-enhanced soldiers who receive nothing but the best training and

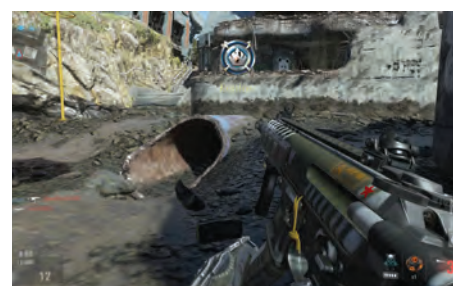
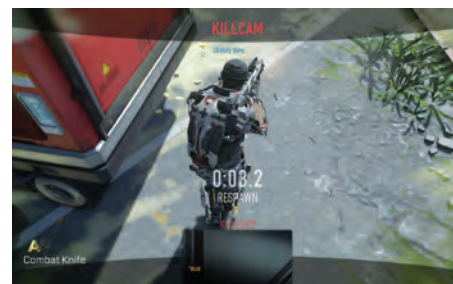
equipment, and the salaries to match.

Things start off like your typical outing, and I started off bored but content to wade through endless shooting galleries until my three or whatever hours penance had elapsed. There were some shooting gallery segments, sure, and while those are always fine enough I found myself more frustrated that I didn't have enough room to run and play with all the cool gadgets and tech that abounds the world. Then things got interesting, and then they got *more* interesting, and then before I knew it the linear experience that dominated the first half of the campaign started to open up. Levels grew bigger; I had new

ways to explore them; I had choices to make – quickly; there were different types of enemies and tactical consequences for being callous. What started as the typical humdrum proves that it's got what it takes to be the future for the series – something that's smart and fun while still being just as bombastic and explosive as it's ever been. I might even go back and play through this one again, which is saying a lot.

And it's a little longer than usual, clocking in at around six hours of typical play. Not a record-setter by any means, but we've got to take the small victories where we can.

Well done, Sledgehammer!



you're facing attack dogs, soldiers and even robots (technically the game's AI bot system). The fun here is based in, on and around the multiplayer maps with one difference: there are upgrade stations for your weapons and Exo suits. It's important to keep upgrading as you go along or you're not going to be able to deal with the pain at the higher tiers. This is an exciting game mode because you never know what is coming next: one round you'll be facing cloaked soldiers, the next you must collect dog tags littered around the map. Fail to get all the tags and they take away your main weapon leaving you with just a sidearm to defend yourself while a timer ticks down – panic. It's frantic and fun and gets more challenging the deeper you play. Of course the only negative here is that everyone is really looking for a fresh zombie mode, which the Exo Survival mode strongly hints at if you keep playing it. The people at Activision know all too well the popularity of the zombie

wave-based experience, first made famous by *Call of Duty: World at War* and only next year will we be blessed with a zombie swarming game... for a price. Boo! **NAG**

- RedTide

86 This could well be the turning point for *CoD*. Between the intense single-player campaign and the ridiculously over-the-top multiplayer mode, there's plenty on offer here.

PLUS / Excellent campaign / Exhilarating multiplayer / Exo Survival mode is decent

MINUS / No zombie mode out-of-the-box / No dedicated servers / Campaign starts out slow

PLATFORMS / XBO

REVIEWED ON / XBO

GENRE / First-person shooter

DEVELOPER / Microsoft

AGE RATING / 16

MULTIPLAYER / Local > 4 players Online > 12 players

PUBLISHER / Microsoft Studios

WEBSITE / www.halowaypoint.com

DISTRIBUTOR / Prima Interactive

Halo: The Master Chief Collection



Remastered Chief Recollection hashtag zing

What has *Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary*, *Halo 2 Anniversary*, *Halo 3*, *Halo 4*, a *Halo 5: Guardians* beta ticket, Ridley Scott's new *Halo: Nightfall* live-action TV show, over 100 multiplayer maps, 4,500 total Gamerscore, and costs about R600? If you guessed "*Halo: The Master Chief Collection*", you're so close. If you guessed "my next purchase, obviously, in fact I'm already rushing out the house byeeee", you're a legit genius.

Completely remastered for the first time since its Xbox launch in 2003, *Halo 2 Anniversary* is the marquee superstar of *Halo: The Master Chief Collection*. Featuring gameplay at a smooth-as-a-grunt's-bum 60 frames per second and (almost) full HD

resolution – actually up-scaled 1328x1080, limited by the classic and *Anniversary* engines running simultaneously – plus entirely new textures, character models, lighting, and sound, and nearly an hour of updated, pre-rendered cut-scenes, even "completely remastered" is a bit of an understatement. For maximum nostalgia, you can swap back to the game's original engine at any time, and be both amazed and appalled at what you thought good graphics were ten years ago.

Although *Halo 3* and *Halo 4* didn't get the same extreme makeover – and probably won't ever need it – both games have been boosted up to 1080p, also at 60 frames per second, and the shaders and anti-aliasing have been reworked to take advantage of the Xbox One's

WARNING: BANDWIDTH DESTRUCTION IN 3, 2, 1

Not so fast, supersoldier – before you can play it, you'll have to download a 20GB update for *Halo: The Master Chief Collection*. Yes, it sucks. No, you can't skip it. The update adds in most of the multiplayer content and a lot of campaign fixes, including proper co-op support. At publish time, *Halo 4*'s supplementary Spartan Ops co-op mission mode was still being prepped for deployment, with a drop date scheduled for an as yet unconfirmed day in December, and the *Halo 5: Guardians* multiplayer beta goes live and loud on 29 December.



Why were *Halo: ODST* and *Halo: Reach* not included in this anthology? Because Master Chief isn't in those games. It's "The Master Chief Collection", not "The Master Chief & The UNSC Gang Collection" and besides, that sounds like a rap album.



much improved hardware. In fact, *Halo 4* looks more or less exactly the same as current-generation games now, which isn't bad for a game that's already two years old – or approximately two million in technology years.

Every game is accessible via a single, unified menu system, with every campaign chapter and Skull modifier, and every multiplayer map and mode unlocked from the get-go. This means that, besides simply playing them through in chronological order, you can basically also create your own custom playlists, jumping from this level, to that level, to the other level, and everything else in between in one session. You can play what you want, how you want it. The future is now, guys. **NAG**

- Azimuth

95 Halo lovers will love it. Halo haters will hate it. That's also the fourth time I've used the same summary for a Halo review, and there are – gasp! – four games in The Master Chief Collection. This is destiny at work, people.

PLUS / ALL THE HALO

MINUS / Split-screen framerate drops

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FIFA 15

You really can Feel The Game

if you like soccer but you're as athletic as a bowl of mac 'n' cheese, this game is definitely the closest you're going to get to feeling like a pro player – and it's pretty damn close. Emotional responses are a big deal in this latest instalment, what with there being 600 new ones. Bad tackles, missed chances, epic goals; these are all responded to in a remarkably life-like manner. This is best seen in the cutaway scenes, which are great and all, but the frequency of these scenes is a bit much. The slogan is "Feel The Game" and the game itself is really quite realistic in the way that players can easily miss a kick or a tackle, due to the updated AI.

The goal celebrations are a nice feature. You can choose how your guys celebrate, whether it's with a silly dance, a fist pump or whatever. This adds nicely to the subtle role-playing elements in the game. There's even a

10-man goal celebration for those 90th minute winners that hit the back of the net, which is pretty cool.

Tactic modes are more specific (park the bus is super defensive, and all-out attack is super aggressive). This determines the players' positions and engagements, allowing you to adopt more of a style of playing, as well as controlling their skills with your wild and panicked button-mashing. In general, in-game tactics have improved. It's much more difficult to score from corners, but the design of the interaction is better.

Attacking has gotten a bit easier, while defence is definitely more difficult – higher scoring games is the result. There is better individual player control; tricks and skills are easier, making movement more effective.

As for the graphics, they've had a huge upgrade. Someone walked into my lounge



and asked who's playing. They were genuinely confused when I said "me". The grass is particularly fascinating and the way that the dudes splash on the field when it's raining? Madness. Seriously.

The downside is definitely that the pick-up-and-play factor is pretty poor and if this is your first FIFA experience, you're going to be pretty lost. The menus are baffling, things aren't labelled plainly, and instructions are seriously unclear.

On the upside, however, Beginner mode is really, REALLY easy and Amateur is quite a bit harder; so once you've found your feet, you still have a decent challenge ahead of you. This applies for the higher levels too, of course. The difficulty-scaling is pretty well done overall in terms of providing you with a good challenge to up your game.

All in all, a smashing game that really lets you feel the excitement and vibe of the real thing.

NAG

- Bellum



82 While there are a couple of annoyances and you're really in the deep-end without water-wings as a noob, this is a great game with incredible graphics and dynamic feedback that really lets you feel like you're out there on the field.

PLUS / Great emotional dynamism / Amazing commentary / Generally awesome life-likeness

MINUS / Rubbish menus

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PLATFORMS / Wii U

REVIEWED ON / Wii U

GENRE / Action / hack and slash

DEVELOPER / Platinum Games

AGE RATING / 16

MULTIPLAYER / Local > 2 players Online > 2 players

PUBLISHER / Nintendo

WEBSITE / bayonetta2.nintendo.com

DISTRIBUTOR / Core Group Games

Bayonetta 2

Empowered in every way, again



Even before getting to any gameplay, Bayonetta was always a very divisive character. Some see her as empowered, sex-positive and in control. Others call her design and motions exploitative and objectifying. I leave it up to you to decide what to think, since there's no real right answer. You're either cool with it, with what the game shows you and what Bayonetta gets up to with those incredibly long legs and hair of hers, or you're not. The game is certainly not above being criticised – all art must be open to critical analysis or it's not art – but my own focus lay more on the gameplay side of things. I'll let the sociologists and such hash out the finer points about Bayonetta's design and personality. My own take: everything she does, every movement she makes, is for her

and nobody else. That the "camera" we see it through shows things in obviously sexualised angles, is fully a part of Bayonetta's control over the situation. And that's as much as I'll say about this hot-button issue.

As for the game side of things: *Bayonetta 2* is above all else an expertly constructed action game with the finest combat system currently in existence. The way you can string together moves, unleash lengthy combination attacks, control space and your opponents, is second to none. The first game was already close to perfect in this regard. The sequel refines it that little bit further. It's almost imperceptible, unless you go play the first one again immediately after playing *Bayonetta 2*. It's just a bit tighter, a bit more responsive, a bit more open to creativity in how you apply the

The new Umbran Climax mechanic lets you exhaust an entire magic gauge to power up all your attacks in both oomph and reach.



Bayonetta moves with all the grace and self-confidence of a pole-dancer, performing for her own amusement.



techniques you've learned. Like most Platinum developed games, *Bayonetta 2* is a sandbox in which to experiment, to compete against the system and see how far you can push it and yourself.

If you're not into learning the combat system to that degree, there is a new Very Easy Mode you play with the touchscreen and stylus. Tapping on enemies makes Bayonetta automatically attack, swipe left or right to dodge. It's obviously quite a dumbed-down way to play, but if you just want to see the story it's perfectly acceptable. Like the first game, the story is a giant hodge-podge clusterduck of crazy, silly, inane, epic, sexy, sweet, heart-warming, rich lore and insane situations. You either go with the madness, or it'll go right over you. Tag Climax Mode is new, allowing for two-player online or local co-op in a series of arena-style battles against enemies. It works surprisingly well. *Bayonetta 2* is a perfect companion and end-cap for the first game, wrapping things up nicely.

NAG
- Miktar

90 While there is plenty that sets Bayonetta 2 apart from its predecessor, like improvements to the flow of combat, it is still enough like the first game that it feels like the second half of a two-part product. The first game is included for free with its sequel, so you get the whole incredible package for one price.

PLUS / Incredible gameplay / Visual feast / Climatic music

MINUS / Mild aliasing / Too sexy for some / Cut-scenes can be corny

24 Days of Giving!

NAG Online's annual 24 Days of Giving competition starts on 1 December. Go to **www.nag.co.za** every day from 1-24 December to see what you can win.



PLATFORMS / PC

REVIEWED ON / PC

AGE RATING / N/A

GENRE / Puzzle / simulator

MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > None

WEBSITE / monstersandmedicine.com

DEVELOPER / Clockwork Acorn

PUBLISHER / Clockwork Acorn

DISTRIBUTOR / Humble Store

Monsters & Medicine

You'll be friends with the monsters on your hospital beds

monsters are an odd choice for sympathetic characters in games, but local indie developers Clockwork Acorn have managed to pull off that very concept quite nicely in their inaugural title *Monsters & Medicine*.

Players are tasked with managing a hospital that caters exclusively to infernal minions. While it may sound similar to previous titles like *Theme Hospital*, *Monsters & Medicine* is a far more accessible and streamlined experience that manages to be infinitely cuter and more charming.

The monsters in question have unique physiologies and seeing to their needs becomes a task unto itself. Each monster is colour-coded and players must ensure that rooms of the corresponding colour are available in order to treat the otherworldly patients. In addition, the monsters queue outside your building and, if left untreated, their conditions deteriorate. It doesn't help that monsters in the front won't give way to monsters in the back, and some of the more aggressive creatures will steal the health of those in front of them. In a pinch, you can choose to quickly heal one monster in the queue, but the game's challenge comes from building more rooms, laying more beds and generally being able to plan ahead.

Despite some performance issues and inability to make it stretch full-screen, it's a fun, absorbing experience with a lot of replayability, great music and cuddly visuals. **NAG**

- Delano



79

A bite-sized puzzler with monstrous appeal.

PLUS / Clever puzzles / Tons of levels

MINUS / Occasional lag with lots of monsters / Issues with maximizing the window

PLATFORMS / Android / iOS

REVIEWED ON / Android

GENRE / Puzzle

AGE RATING / None

MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > None

WEBSITE / www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/online_science/apps/transmission.aspx

DEVELOPER / British Science Museum

PUBLISHER / British Science Museum

DISTRIBUTOR / Apple App Store / Google Play



Transmission

Making connections, the fun way

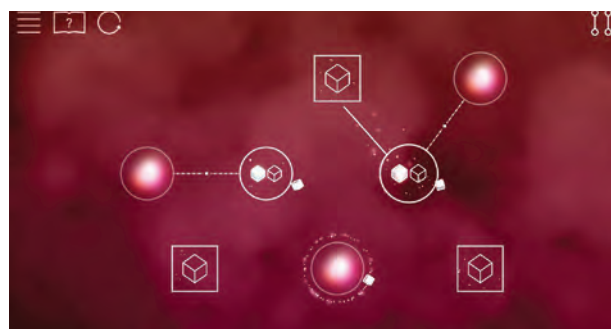
all the time, every day of our lives, we exploit the various communications technologies around us. From phones to satellites to the Internet itself, we use them constantly, yet only a fraction of us have anything more than a cursory understanding of how it all works. *Transmission*, by the British Science Museum, won't turn you into an expert in the field, but it certainly presents the subject in a clever and artful game package.

Gameplay is simplicity itself: players are presented with nodes containing "information". The object is to fill all the nodes – representing different telecommunications devices – with data. This is accomplished by using your finger to drag and create new pathways between devices, allowing for a clean, unbroken path for info to travel.

As time wears on and new levels are unlocked, the operations of data transmitters change and the relationships between different devices becomes more complex. Meta-goals begin appearing, such as being restricted to a certain number of pathways or devising a path that still leaves redundant data on specific nodes. The better you perform, the more stars you earn, and new stars will unlock more levels.

The aesthetic is amazing, with bright colours and simple shapes. The music is beautiful, relaxing ambient and the sound effects correspond to old dial tones. It's totally absorbing and is a must-play. **NAG**

- Delano



90

Science becomes art in this abstract puzzler that everyone should play..

PLUS / Beautiful aesthetics / Interesting puzzles

MINUS / Later levels can be fiendishly difficult / Dial-tone sounds can get annoying

PLATFORMS / iOS / Android
 REVIEWED ON / Android
 AGE RATING / 7
 GENRE / Puzzle / role-playing game
 MULTIPLAYER / Local > 4 players Online > 4 players
 WEBSITE / us.monster-strike.com
 DEVELOPER / Mixi
 PUBLISHER / Mixi
 DISTRIBUTOR / Google Play

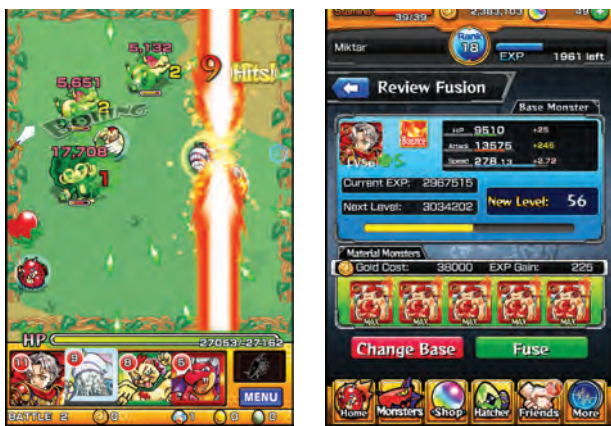
Monster Strike

The best freemium balls

There are like, a billion free games on mobile. Probably two billion. I think it went up by another billion while you were reading this sentence. Anything that becomes even remotely popular is instantly cloned and another billion are added. *Flappy Bird*? Try *Crappy Bird*, *Tappy Bird*, *Fappy Bard*, *Slappy Nards*... So if you go looking for *Monster Strike*, check that the developer is Mixi or you might get some weird knock-off.

That said, why even care about some freemium mobile game anyway? Aren't most just shallow feedback loops with no real gameplay? Yes, most are. Occasionally, one comes along you can engage with, not just tap on and wait for timers to empty out or fill up. *Monster Strike* has actual gameplay. It was co-created by Yoshiaki Okamoto, a game designer credited with many popular titles like *Final Fight* and *Street Fighter II*. The premise is simple: you collect monsters (represented as little balls), form teams of three monsters and then take them into battle scenarios. You pull back on the screen to charge and set an angle, then release to slide a monster ball into enemy balls. Your monsters will ricochet, trigger special attacks when they hit each other, and there are boss battles where you need to hit specific weak points. It's simple, yet engaging. **NAG**

- Miktar



77 If you look past the blatant *Puzzle & Dragons* cloned interface and freemium functions like the "stamina" system and "orbs" needed to unlock more inventory space, *Monster Strike* is a decent little time-waster with some good ideas. The core gameplay of throwing balls at things is fun, but the four-player co-op really makes it.

PLUS / Fun / Simple mechanics / Can childproof to prevent purchases

MINUS / Freemium trappings / Either too easy or too hard

PLATFORM / PC
 REVIEWED ON / PC
 GENRE / Management / simulation
 AGE RATING / 12
 MULTIPLAYER / Local > None Online > None
 WEBSITE / www.spacebasedf9.com
 DEVELOPER / Double Fine Productions
 PUBLISHER / Double Fine Productions
 DISTRIBUTOR / Digital (Steam)

Spacebase DF-9

Half-baked space adventures

A side-project by the venerable Double Fine, *Spacebase DF-9* had ambitions of being "*Dwarf Fortress* but in SPACE!" It's in space, that part they finished pretty early on. The entire everything else part, the parts that involve managing a large, complex and interrelated system of many smaller systems all working together and against each other – that part they didn't quite finish. Much of what was promised for *Spacebase DF-9* was dropped just before release (the game had been in Early Access for about a year). The game was given a half-decent tutorial, opened up so users could modify and "finish" the game themselves, and a few meta-goals were added to give the experience a bit of structure.

So what you're left with is something that so painfully looks like the start of something great but then never actually goes there. You can build your base, take on space immigrants, juggle their needs and desires, fend off raiders and explore derelicts that may appear. But it all feels pointless, unless you chase the arbitrary goals the team shoved in at the last minute, like "have a base with X amount of denizens". It's a pity the game didn't get more support in Early Access, as a lack of interest from consumers is why Double Fine claims to have dropped the project. **NAG**

- Miktar



All it takes is one breach of a wall or floor and you can lose everything to the vacuum of space, so plan accordingly by placing airlocks where prudent.

67 There's a lot to like about *Spacebase DF-9*. It's a reasonably competent management game, but woefully incomplete in terms of content and features. It's fun to poke and prod for a while, but there isn't enough depth to make it last. User-made mods might fix this in the long run.

PLUS / Charming aesthetic / Amusing flavour text

MINUS / It's incomplete / Interface is cludgy

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HARDWIRED

by Neo Sibeko

Better upgrades through smarter purchases. Prior to this issue I had wanted to do a buyer's guide for all those gamers with moderate amounts of money to spend on their computer upgrades. For various reasons this didn't happen, and so I decided to write it here instead. Even that didn't pan out because while I was putting it together I realised that such guides, more times than not, served only to reflect what I would buy with X amount of money more than its true value. In other words, the guide would have little to do with the "performance" of the hardware or software but everything to do with just being accustomed to high-end hardware.

Playing games is a major motivator for upgrading your system, but as it turns out, the individuals who buy high-end hardware are the ones with the highest hardware turnover of any demographic. So, doing yet another buyers guide that only caters to those with very deep pockets wasn't going to be useful at all.

The only thing I can say is that if you do plan on building a machine using whatever bonus or disposable income you may come across at this time of the year, perhaps consider buying long term products or components instead of the latest and greatest CPU or GPU. This isn't because it's a bad time to do so, there's always greater technology on the horizon so that isn't a valid reason. Essentially, spending money on the things we take for granted more wisely ends up delivering an overall better experience than say another graphics card upgrade would bring. This is especially true if you're already more than well equipped to run all of today's games at the highest graphics fidelity possible. Adding yet more processing power to that will net you nothing at all.

Instead, take this time to finally invest in a sensible mouse, a high quality keyboard, a set of power speakers, even a sound card if you will, and most importantly a decent screen. Even if you're not ready to delve into UHD gaming, there's some sensibility in upgrading your monitor. This is not only for your viewing pleasure but for health benefits as well. For instance if you can find an IPS or PLS monitor, even if it's a FHD model, it may be worth buying that. You'll be able to game longer, appreciating all those fancy pixels your graphics card pumps out. Some would argue that these kinds of displays sacrifice too much in slow response times, but I've found that the individuals sensitive to this are the very competitive and professional players or those who just happen to be very sensitive to motion. For the most part, most of us are not, and going from a 2ms GTG TN panel to a 5 or 6ms panel is not going to make a difference. What will make a difference is the more accurate colour reproduction and

the reduced blue lighting, which is primarily what causes fatigue and strain on our vision. The harder it is for your eyes to resolve an image or adjust to it, the more strain you're placing on your eyes and health in general.

Like most people, I have also been a victim of lopsided upgrades in this department. Spending an exorbitant amount on yet more storage or processing power, but filtering and receiving all of that through the same sub-standard display. That monitor you buy for R7,000 or even R9,000 may seem ridiculously expensive, but it will last you through four or even five graphics card upgrades or system upgrades at the least. Consider as well that you'll spend many times that on components in the lifespan of your monitor.

If you can as well, consider a bigger display, not only because it allows more real estate but you can sit farther back reducing eye strain even further. The same applies to your keyboard, your mouse and the set of headphones that you use. In a situation where you have the best of these peripherals and an entry level to mid-range computer in performance terms, you'll be better off than the person with a R12,000 graphics card and a R1,400 monitor for instance. This would extend to your headphones and your game controller. Not every upgrade need have its value dictated by numbers. The really beneficial upgrades are the ones that we rarely pay much attention to. So as you consider what new tech to buy for your machine this holiday season, do consider making a more long term investment. You'll be happier for it for sure. **NAG**

Neo once stole 47 tins of pickled octopus from a market stall somewhere north of Okinawa. Nobody knows what he needed them for, but sometimes on a Monday morning if you sniff hard you can smell pickled tentacle.

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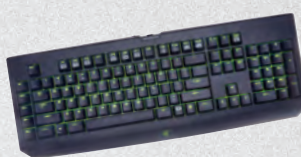
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➤ **KEYBOARD**

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R1,700 / www.razerzone.com



➤ **COOLER**

Cooler Master Nepton 280L
R1,499 / www.coolermaster.com



➤ **MOUSE**

GAMDIAS Zeus gaming mouse
R918 / www.gamdias.com



➤ **MOUSE MAT**

Razer Ironclad
R599 / www.razerzone.com



➤ **SOUND**

Creative Sound Blaster ZxR
R3,599 / www.soundblaster.com



➤ **HEADPHONES**

Plantronics GameCom Commander
R4,569 / www.plantronics.com

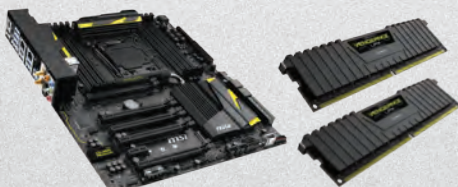


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R6,199 / www.corsair.com

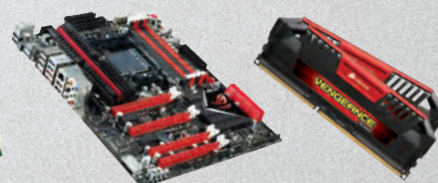


AMD

AMD FX 8350
R2,999 / www.amd.com

ASUS CROSSHAIR V FORMULA-Z
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CORSAIR VENGEANCE PRO 2,666MHZ C11 16GB KIT
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INTEL DREAM MACHINE

R69,684

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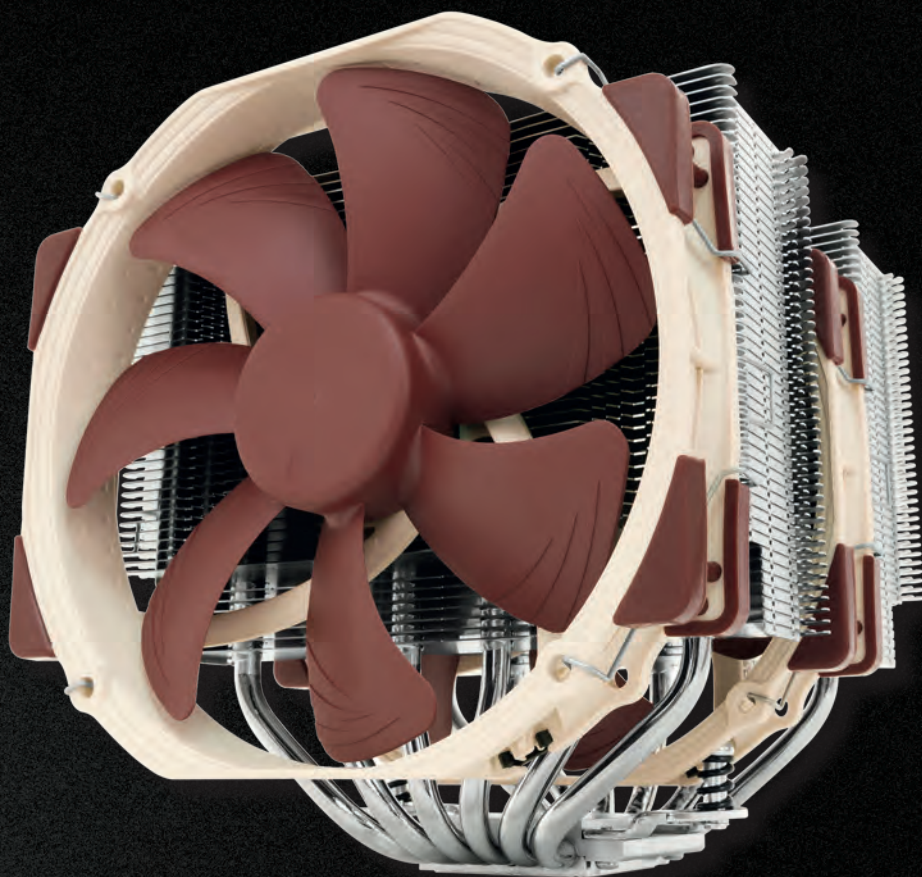
**NOCTUA
NH-D15**

VERSUS

**COOLER MASTER
NEPTON 240M**

The summer is here, and you just may be in need of a new CPU cooler. This is especially true if you upgraded to the latest X99 platform and its CPUs. Since these are warmer than the outgoing X79 CPUs by 10W but at lower clock speeds (at least for the 5960X), now is as good a time as any to buy a CPU cooler. If you have any of the other high-end water coolers, you'll be more than ready for this platform, but for those who are making their first foray into high-end systems or even using the low leakage AMD 9000 series FX CPUs, between these two coolers you just may find the cooler you're looking for.

As usual we took two of these competing products and put them next to each other to find out how similar or different they are in what they offered. As usual, we would not compare two products that are not in any way, shape, or form comparable and thus, whichever you decide to buy you'll still get a great cooler. The only question is which one suits your system and cooling requirements more.



NOCTUA NH-D15

▶ VALUE FOR MONEY

This is a fairly new CPU cooler and there's currently no local pricing but from the USD price, it is identical to the 240M. Depending on your budget, over R1,000 for a CPU cooler is going to be a lot of money, but we would argue that you're not cooling your X99 or even AMD FX system with a cheaper CPU cooler, because both these CPUs don't come with boxed coolers. They are expensive components and in the context of all that, \$99 USD isn't much to pay at all even if it ends up being almost double that on our shores. As far as value goes, these two CPU coolers are certainly tied.

▶ PERFORMANCE

As we've always maintained, these days it's hard to justify the price difference between the vast majority of high-end all-in-one coolers. With air coolers it's a different story because even though we've seen

fewer of these recently, the ones that still manage to garner some attention are the very high-end units such as the NH-D14, the predecessor of this model. The NH-D15 is an improvement on the original cooler in that it's bigger, has better fan technology and higher RPM fans as well. In isolation it's hard to tell them apart but in performance the NH-D15 pips the D14 every time. The real challenge however is how it fared against the Nepton 240M. Well, there wasn't much between the two to be honest. On the Core i7 5960X powered machine we tested them in, there really was no load temperature difference. Idle temps were something else though as the Nepton cooler was clearly superior by up to three degrees. However this isn't as important as what happens when the system is under load and that's where NH-D15 held its own against a 240mm liquid cooling unit. That's always going to be impressive.

▶ EASE OF USE

Probably the weakest part of the NH-D15 is how cumbersome it is and as a result can be a pain to install. Fortunately you'll only do this once, but make sure you plan it out before you attempt it. This is particularly important if you have the taller memory modules such as the Kingston Hyper-X Predator or Corsair Dominator Platinum modules. These are a little too tall (more the latter of the two actually) to have the fan sit at the center of the fin arrays; thus you'll have to have the fans towering slightly above the heat pipes which makes the cooler even taller. A problem for the smaller cases for sure. This is the single niggle where we wished Noctua would have perhaps made more provision for such DIMMS. Other than that, this is one amazing CPU cooler.



COOLER MASTER NEPTON 240M

VALUE FOR MONEY

This CPU cooler costs as much as the Noctua offering here, at least in the US. What may end up making this a cheaper purchase is that Cooler Master has a much bigger footprint on our shores than Noctua, so based on volume alone, that may drive prices down to where the Nepton 240M is a few hundred rand cheaper and thus has a better value for money proposition. We can't say that conclusively as this cooler is even newer than the Noctua NH-D15 throughout the entire world. As it stands though we do suspect this will be the more affordable of the two.

PERFORMANCE

Cooler Master has had so many liquid cooling kits that it would be a surprise if this performed like anything but the best of them. The Nepton is clearly a better product than the previous coolers such as the Seidon series. The Nepton presents

refinement and an attention to detail and build quality that is as good as you can get from any other vendor. With that comes the performance you've come to expect that keeps the power hungry Core i7 5960X well behaved. The Nepton 240M didn't outperform the NH-D15 at load temperatures, but at idle it did a better job. There was no difference in the noise generated because the Noctua cooler is extraordinarily quiet. As such, the liquid cooling advantage of quieter operation was nowhere to be found. We appreciated the lower idle temperatures but ultimately they don't mean much in the grand scheme. Essentially you want that cooling capacity or advantage when you're loading the system and that's where it counts the most. Thus there really isn't a difference between these two as far as we're concerned.

EASE OF USE

Cooler Master has in no uncertain terms mastered the art of AIO assembly. You don't even need instructions for this as it's very self-explanatory. This is particularly true when you install the unit on an X99 motherboard. If it takes you five minutes it's probably too long. Granted this is a platform that requires no back plate for most coolers. In comparison to the NH-D15, it was night and day. The 240M had a very clear and obvious lead here even if it's by virtue of the platform used. That it has fewer parts to assemble or at least fewer intricate parts to assemble makes this not only an attractive cooler for enthusiasts and gamers alike, but it makes a strong case for itself for those who work with many platforms at the same time like overclockers who are binning CPUs. **NAG**

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Disney Infinity 2.0 Marvel Super Heroes Starter Pack

Website / infinity.disney.com

RRP / R899.00 [360 / PS3 / Wii U] | R999.00 [PS4 / XBO]

SUPPLIER / Prima Interactive

If you (or your kids) love everything Marvel is doing these days, then this is probably going to be on your festive season shopping list. Inside the box you'll find the *Disney Infinity 2.0* base, three *Avengers* figures, one play set piece and two game discs, as well as the software disc featuring the 2.0 Toy Box, a web code for digital goodies, and a poster. It's all very exciting and fun but does feel like more of the same with a few, but not major, improvements – which isn't terrible if you fall into the targeted demographic. The supplied play set is a fun romp through New York defeating Frost Giants controlled by Loki. You'll get to jump, smash, shoot and drive your way through the bad guys collecting things as you go. The action and combat has been improved from the original and now you can upgrade your characters via a skill tree offering new options and some extended playability down the line. It's fun but short and the whole city feels like a digital frame that still needs to be filled in a little here and there. Overall a decent bit of gaming time especially when you add the two supplied game discs for the Toy Box.



THE BASE

This is the platform where the game characters are placed, as well as the play sets and game discs (the discs are hexagonal so don't get confused). Power discs (not pictured) can also be bought and stacked under the figures to enhance and expand the experience in different ways. The base connects to your console of choice via a lengthy USB cable.

MARVEL SUPER HERO FIGURES

Iron Man, Thor and Black Widow are supplied

in the starter pack but of course many more can be bought in stores this festive season. Two character figures can be placed on the base, so two players can enjoy a single starter kit – just watch for fighting over who gets to be Iron Man.

THE PLAY SET

This is the actual game supplied with the starter pack; this must be placed on the base to fight the Frost Giants and Loki in New York. In previous versions the play set

contained more locations and adventures but here it's limited to a single adventure and location – boo.

TOY BOX GAME DISCS

Used with the Toy Box, one disc is a type of tower defence game and the other is an escape the maze third-person adventure game. Not bad for showing kids that different kinds of game styles are possible in the world. **NAG**

SUMMARY

PROS

- New characters
- Improved gameplay
- Toy Box 2.0 is epic

CONS

- Limited play set variety
- Repetitive play dynamic

ALTERNATIVES

- *Skylanders: Trap Team*

MSI GS60 2QE Ghost Pro 3K Gold Edition

Website / www.msi.com

ERP / R31,999

Supplier / MSI

SPECS

CPU	Intel Core i7 4710HQ
GPU	NVIDIA GTX 970M 3GB
MEMORY	16GB DDR3 1,600MHz (dual channel)
STORAGE	512GB SSD (2x 256) / 1TB 7.2K RPM HDD
OPTICAL DRIVE	None

What you see before you is a slim 1.9kg gaming notebook. At a hair under 2cm in girth, this is yet again a notebook for those who truly want portability and comfort above all else. From where we sit, there's really no reason for any gaming notebook to be thicker or heavier. MSI once again strikes gold with the dimensions to say the least.

Before we go into what makes this a fantastic gaming notebook, let's talk about the "gold" finish on it. It looks wonderful in pictures and it is strangely appealing as well, but we're not sure how robust this gold finish would turn out to be in say 12 months. Perhaps a brushed aluminium package would have been a better choice. It does also come in a regular black finish, so if gold isn't really your personal taste then you have an alternate colour option to go with.

Right then, let's talk about what makes this a worthwhile gaming notebook over everything else on the market. For one, it is powered by the latest Maxwell GPU in the form of the GTX 970M. Obviously it does not have the full complement of render outputs and so forth as presented on the desktop part, but it has plenty of advances over the outgoing Kepler (800 series) models to warrant your attention. Simply put, it packs more of a punch than the GTX 880M. That's right, for a lower TDP and subsequently longer battery life, it offers higher performance than last month's GT72. It isn't worlds apart but it's enough to play *Tomb Raider*, at the ultimate graphics setting (apart from TressFX) at a solid 64.4fps in FHD. That is plenty of performance right there and to put that in context, it outclasses a highly overclocked desktop GTX 750 Ti by some margin which only manages 54fps. Why this matters is because in the previous generation, the GTX 870M for instance was not capable of matching this desktop GPU, falling short by around 10%.

With all this power, it means you can play every game there is on the market at 1080p at high to maximum detail levels.

Stay away from the anti-aliasing though as memory bandwidth is about half of what is available on the desktop model at 120GB/s on the mobile GPU.

Directly related to your gaming experience is the 3K IPS panel that MSI has chosen for this model. More specifically this is a 2880x1640 display that is a sight to behold. Much like all IPS panels it has precise colour reproduction even at the most steep viewing angles. It is distortion free and is the most notable qualitative aspect of this machine. The higher resolution doesn't do much for desktop real estate as you're dealing with 15.6" of space. Also do keep in mind that you'll not be able to play modern games at this native resolution as our performance in *Tomb Raider* literally

halved to 32.2fps. As such, you're better off sticking solely to 1080p. It also would have probably made more sense for MSI to stick with an FHD IPS panel of the same quality as well, that way you're never getting any interpolation when looking at the game image. Regardless, this is still a great combination of display and cutting edge GPU technology.

MSI have facilitated the process



**BENCHMARK
RESULTS**

PC Mark8 Creative Suite
(OpenCL accelerated): **5,996**
Battery time: **1h:28m:37s**
3DMark Fire Strike: **5,543**
Tomb Raider DX11 1080p: **64.4**

“With all this power, it means
you can play every game there
is on the market at 1080p at
high to maximum detail levels.”

of configuring the machine for the right situation as well. You can pick between three modes which dictate power, battery life and the amount of heat generated. Performance is scaled accordingly and all this can be selected with a combination of the function and F-number keys. How this works with NVIDIA's own power saving mechanism in limiting frame rates isn't clear, but there may be an opportunity to use both mechanisms to further extend battery life for those gaming sessions on the go.

Usability outside of the gaming context is always going to be very

subjective. What we can say for sure is that there are a few shortcomings here and could just be a simple oversight. For instance, the “Caps” key has no light that indicates its status. That is, despite the entire keyboard being backlit, this was somehow not thought about. So you have lights, but they only work in a gaming environment. Furthermore, the keyboard on the GT72 spoiled us because it is housed on a separate piece of material than the casing, thus it has no flex at all when you push on it. However this isn't the case here, but it's understandable because the notebook is just so slim.

There's literally no place to put it.

Audio sounds pretty much like all the previous notebooks with sound from DynAudio. It's adequate but hardly worth mentioning other than that it's powered by Sound Blaster Cinema 2 software. It's best experienced through headphones and gaming that way works well along with watching movies and listening to music. This is provided you have a set of semi-good cans.

Locally, MSI will be bundling a mouse with this notebook which isn't the case in other regions, and we do appreciate this. At R32,000 it would be a travesty to not bundle such a basic peripheral with it, especially since it's a gaming notebook and there's no way you'd be gaming on the trackpad, despite how great it is. This isn't the direct successor to the original GS60 Ghost we reviewed some months ago, but given just how close the two are in pricing, there's really no reason for you to consider the other model. If you can get this in the original black or don't mind the gold then this is certainly the notebook you should be buying. Once you've used the Ghost Pro it'll be hard to use anything else as most notebooks will seem underpowered, heavy and just lacking in performance and display quality. From a technical standpoint this is near perfect for this form factor and you can hardly go wrong with a purchase here. Design wise, some things could have been executed better, but they don't serve to detract from the overall quality of the product.

If anything, the GS60 2QE Ghost Pro 3K Gold Edition is a testament to MSI's commitment to making gaming notebooks that stand out from the rest. This model proves once again just how far ahead MSI is of the competition. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

8

An even better version of the previous GS60 Ghost, this model has incredible performance and features.

PLUS / GTX 970M GPU / Runs very cool and light weight / Amazing IPS display

MINUS / Gold paint is garish to say the least / Useless indicator lights / Keyboard flexing

ASUS X99-A

Website / www.asus.com

ERP / R3,999

Supplier / ASUS

SPECS

CHIPSET	Intel X99
MEMORY	8x 280-pin DDR5
CPU SUPPORT	LGA 2011-V3
EXPANSION	4x PCIe 16X, 2x PCIe 1X
SIZE	ATX

There's no denying that the X99 platform is a powerful one. It's expensive, but it is immensely more current than the aged X79 chipset it has replaced. Power users from a performance and features point of view have never had it this good.

We had hoped that with the X99 chipset it would allow all vendors to undo the great tragedy that was the vast majority of X79 motherboards. Officially, the only worthwhile X79 motherboards were from ASUS and a single offering from EVGA in the form of the X79 Dark. Everything else was nothing short of disappointing and most of the boards just didn't work properly at all.

With the X99 chipset, most vendors have come to the party prepared, but again ASUS has managed to up the ante and, even this early in the game, are ahead of the competition. Do not mistake this as saying there aren't any competent X99 motherboards on the market from competitors. There are and many are good boards, but the ASUS range is just better. This isn't from a features perspective, at least not in non-overclocking features. It's literally in memory compatibility. You see, the thing is that technically, all boards adhere to the DDR4 spec and Intel CPUs which only call for 2,133MHz compatibility. Thus, everything else above that is optional. In reality though, that is hardly a frequency that warrants switching to DDR4. You may as well make use of very early DDR3 modules and platforms. No, what we want as power users, enthusiasts and gamers is the best performance possible and that means speeds at the very least above 2,666MHz.

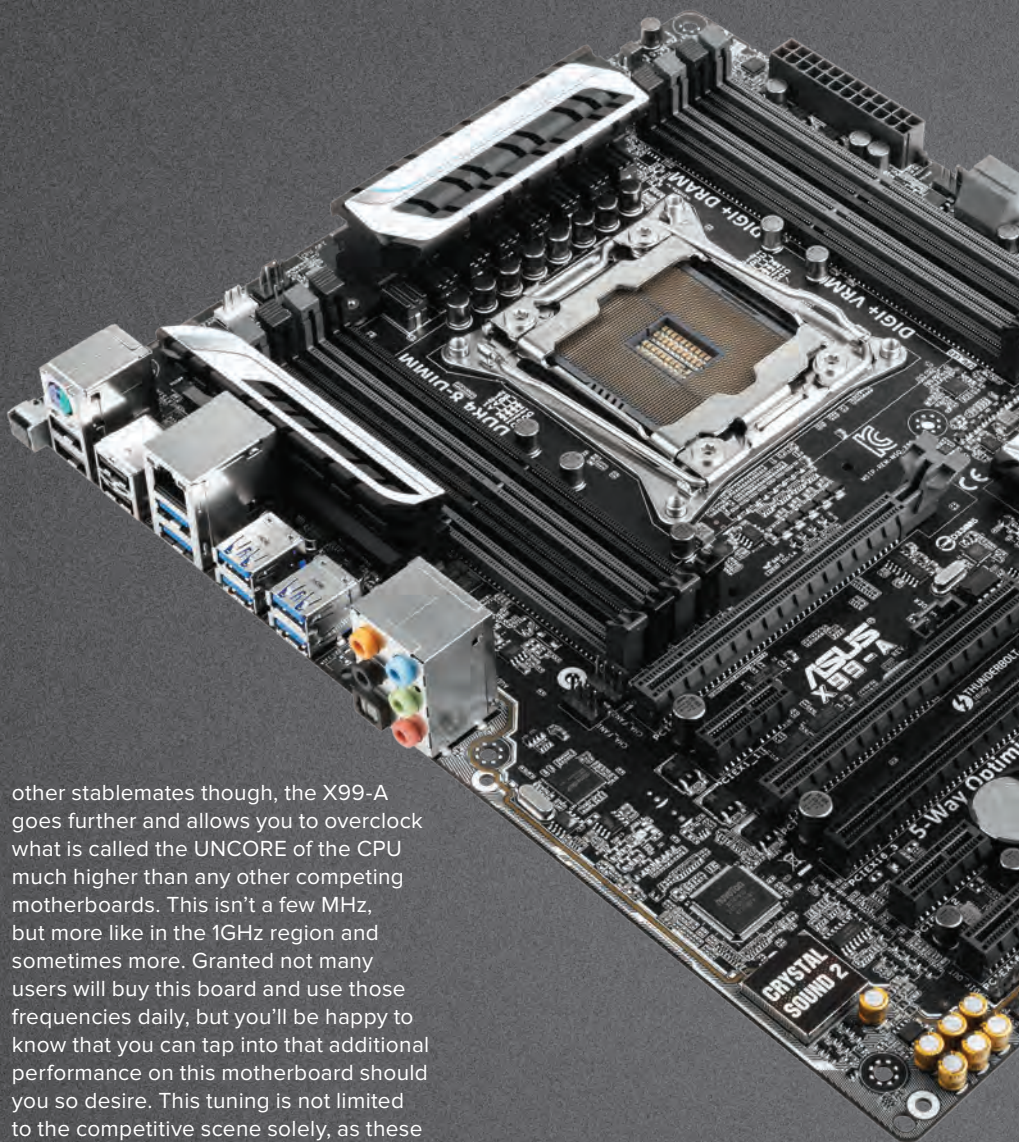
The ASUS X99-A, like its brethren, not only achieves this, but will easily run 3,200MHz sets out the box. A feat that thus far only the Rampage V Extreme and less than a handful of others can claim. Every other motherboard needs manual tuning and some won't even reach that memory speed. Like with the

other stablemates though, the X99-A goes further and allows you to overclock what is called the UNCORE of the CPU much higher than any other competing motherboards. This isn't a few MHz, but more like in the 1GHz region and sometimes more. Granted not many users will buy this board and use those frequencies daily, but you'll be happy to know that you can tap into that additional performance on this motherboard should you so desire. This tuning is not limited to the competitive scene solely, as these differences are apparent when using regular air cooling as well.

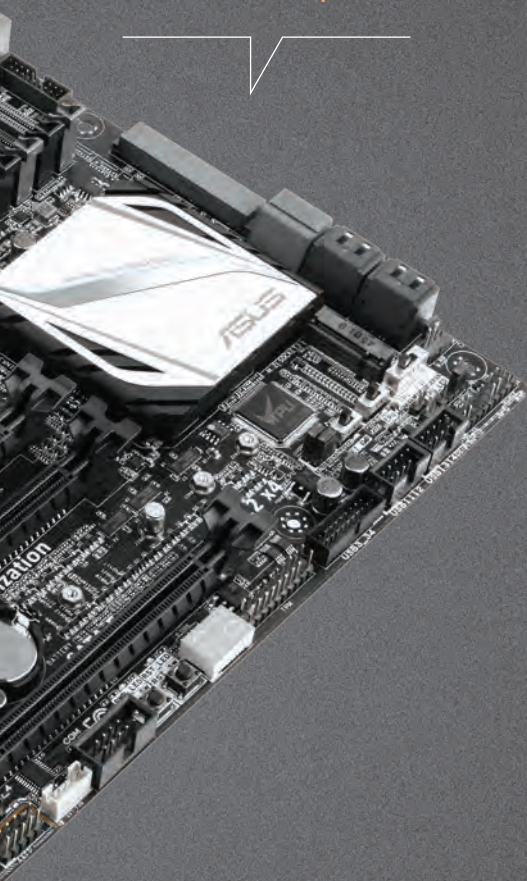
Now, if you match the high memory frequency compatibility and the impressive UNCORE overclocking, you end up with a motherboard that is easily the fastest we've tested. The most intriguing thing about this is that this is the budget board from the entire ASUS range. Thus you can imagine how much better the DELUXE and most certainly the Rampage V board is. For those who may want to exploit this advantage the ASUS motherboards have, be advised that on the X99-A, there is only one 12V CPU connector. Given just how much current the 5960X CPU can draw, the system may

trip the PSU which, if it's a good PSU will register as a power surge. There is a way around this but it requires a dual 12V CPU connector plug, which you would then plug into this motherboard. GIGABYTE for instance provide this connector on their SOC-Force motherboards, but it does not ship with the X99-A. On the Rampage V Extreme, this plug isn't necessary because it has two CPU 12V power connectors, thus allowing the system to load multiple 12V lines simultaneously.

That entire aspect of the board aside, ASUS has been steadily tweaking their UEFI interface since its introduction. It's seen some improvements and as it stands



“ With the X99 chipset, most vendors have come to the party prepared, but again ASUS has managed to up the ante and, even this early in the game, are ahead of the competition.”



it's the smoothest it's been. It's not an HD or perhaps 1080p capable UEFI like you have on the GIGABYTE motherboards for instance, but it does have the smoothest animation and easily the most well packed features list when compared to the competition.

For instance the X99-A allows you to not only turn off CPU cores, which all motherboards lately are capable of, but it goes further and allows you to pick exactly which cores you want to disable. Thus if you have two particularly hot cores for example, you will be able to disable them and leave the rest operating normally. This is a feature that has so far not made its way into any other motherboard, at least outside of the ASUS offerings.

Other than that you'll find the usual

UEFI options, plenty of profiles and the ability to capture screenshots as well. Configuring fans on this motherboard has also proved to be simple and intuitive. The UEFI can test your respective fan and find its limits, thus allowing you to adjust its heat response curve accordingly. It's not a matter of just plugging in a fan and setting a speed, but each fan can be tested separately and adjusted appropriately for its capabilities.

Out of the UEFI/BIOS options screen you'll find that this isn't a motherboard where ASUS spent a lot of money on the components. They are not cheap by any means, but next to Sabertooth and ROG products, there isn't anything worth highlighting. It has all the basics, such as ClrCMOS, MemOK, power, reset and POST code LED. In addition, there's three switches for TPU versions (I and II), EPU and easy XMP. Once again, the ASUS board allows you to flash the UEFI/BIOS without needing a CPU at all using USB BIOS flashback.

The audio part is acceptable, offering similar quality to the plethora of ALC1150 codec based solutions on the market. Not surprising because it uses that very same codec backed up by an op-amp and Nichicon gold capacitors. It'll do just fine but will hardly blow you away. If you're serious about your audio you'll definitely want to invest in the ASUS Phoebus or any other discrete audio solution.

For an entry level X99 motherboard, it

isn't cheap. Then again, there aren't any cheap X99 motherboards. The platform is inherently expensive and such prices should be expected. The X99-A does, for the money, give you plenty, perhaps in many ways more than what other vendors provide for a much higher financial investment. The price difference between this motherboard and the DELUXE on our side of the world isn't as big as it is in other countries, thus, you may consider the DELUXE version, given just how much more it offers, including Wi-Fi and Bluetooth connectivity to list just a couple.

Still, if you're not able to stretch your budget and want a motherboard that can pretty much do it all, you can't go wrong with the ASUS X99-A. It's a wonderful board and for the price, it'll be hard to beat. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

8 The ASUS X99-A is the cheapest in the family but it more than matches many competitor's high-end offerings.

PLUS / Wonderful UEFI/BIOS / Some overclocking features / Great memory compatibility

MINUS / Not for extreme overclocking / Average audio controller

Corsair Dominator Platinum DDR4 3,200MHz 16GB

Website / www.corsair.com

ERP / R9,999

Supplier / Rectron

SPECS	FREQUENCY	3,200MHz
	TIMINGS	16-18-18-36 (XMP 2.0)
	VOLTAGE	1.35V



Here's a high speed DDR4 set made exclusively for competitive overclockers and enthusiasts. We're talking about the type of individuals who buy or build machines costing as much as the NAG Dream Machine. This is a premium set, but believe it or not isn't the most high-end kit you will find in the Dominator range. That is reserved for the 3,333MHz version which costs even more. However, in real terms, this is the fastest memory speed you can realistically use on any system, regardless of you being a veteran overclocker or a keen enthusiast.

As it stands, there are no 3,333MHz dividers when using the 100MHz base clock on the only DDR4 supporting platform. You can achieve this by using the 125MHz base clock; however there's not a single Haswell-E CPU that supports this base clock in combination with the memory multiplier. That is why 3,200MHz is the limit at present. Given that the successor to Haswell-E CPUs (Broadwell-E) is unlikely to show up prior to 2016, 3,200MHz is where we will be for a while, at least on this platform.

If you're not deterred by the exorbitant price, what you'll find here is the fastest memory kit we've ever tested and quite possibly the fastest your money can buy. This is not frequency dependant, but in combination with the memory timings. See, this set is sold as a 16-18-18-36 kit. That is the X.M.P 2.0 profile which dictates these timings are to be used at 3,200MHz. What we found though was that you could operate this kit at the given 1.35V with incredible 15-16-15-20 settings. That's just unbelievable because there aren't 3,000MHz kits that are sold with such timings. That this kit could achieve this at 200MHz higher is nothing short of phenomenal. Even if you're not able to run the kit at the designated frequencies, it means you'll have plenty of room to fine tune the memory for your specific motherboard and CPU combination.

The benefits of such high memory



speeds are significant in content creation, rendering and encoding (not using the GPU), especially of 4K content. The difference in productivity is more pronounced the higher the speed, even with the CPU clock speed kept constant. This is however to do with the UNCORE speed on the system. The higher this frequency, the more legroom the memory has to perform better. To get a high UNCORE frequency though needs some tuning and this is where the expertise of enthusiasts and competitive overclockers may be needed. So it's very easy to see why this kit caters specifically for that demographic. For gamers, you'd be better served with the likes of the Vengeance LPX series (our current Dream Machine kit) or any other DDR4 that you can afford for that matter. Chances are you can get double the capacity and have some money left over as opposed to buying this kit.

Where performance is concerned we would have wanted to give this kit the Dream Machine award. There isn't a more deserving kit anywhere; however the

pricing for the amount of memory you get makes that unfeasible. As it is, this memory costs more than any graphics card you can buy save for the TITAN-Z and in context, it just doesn't make sense to have this as the memory of choice for such a build.

Be that as it may, the Dominator Platinum DDR4 3,200 set is the king of the hill and we'd wager that there isn't a faster memory kit money can buy anywhere. For sheer performance alone this one receives a perfect 10. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

10

The fastest memory kit money can buy.

PLUS / 3,200MHz frequency / Amazing flexibility / Fastest memory kit ever tested

MINUS / That price / Only 16GB

Astraphobe Lightning Protection System

Website / www.astraphobe.com

ERP / R1,399 Supplier / Astraphobe

Almost anyone who's been around or involved with computers knows "that dreaded smell" – it's that fine burnt silicon scent that sometimes accompanies a particularly brutal lightning storm. Often there's a flicker of lights or even a loud popping sound that came just before you smelt it. However it occurred, you know that your modem, and possibly everything connected to it, is dead.

This problem can be avoided by applying a simple principle: disconnect your stuff. But it's not always possible to do so. Maybe you're out for the evening or couldn't possibly drag yourself away from the latest episode of *The Walking Dead*. Thankfully, we live in the future, one where this little box of science and magic can take care of this headache for us.

The Astraphobe isn't a surge protector, it's a surge stopper. Inside this surprisingly large box are sensors and meteorological wizardry that detect nearby lightning storms by analysing electromagnetic waves in the atmosphere. It really does that – we're not making this up. If it picks up any suspicious activity within its preselected radius (five to 20km), it physically disconnects your phone line and prevents any arcing to ensure that your modem and any connected equipment is safe. Bear in mind that it only takes care of your phone line – any lightning strike on your house that hits the mains (and isn't shut down by your home's built-in defences) could still cause damage.

- Geoff Burrows



9

It's somewhat difficult to "review" this device, suffice to say that it does everything it says on the box. We're just so impressed with this neat little piece of kit that even the price doesn't seem so steep.

PLUS / Could save you pots of money / Very neat installation / It's science fiction in a box

MINUS / Kind of large / No power line protection

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GIGABYTE GTX 980 G1 Gaming

Website / www.gigabyte.com ERP / R10,199 Supplier / Rectron

SPECS

CORE	GM204 (28nm) 1,228MHz (1,329MHz Boost)
PROCESSORS	2,048
RENDER OUTPUTS	64 / 128
MEMORY	4,096MB GDDR5 7GHz (224GB/sec)
API	DirectX 12 / OpenGL 4.5 / OpenCL / PhysX / CUDA



Last month we reviewed the GTX 970 from GIGABYTE. This time we have the bigger and faster GTX 980. If you look quickly at the two you'd be forgiven for thinking they are identical apart from the GPU. This couldn't be further from the truth because this entire PCB is different. Given that a reference GTX 980 actually exists, unlike with the 970, it made it easier for us to compare what GIGABYTE has done versus what NVIDIA spec'd in the "regular design". For one, GIGABYTE has chosen to go with a much beefier VRM system, with more power phases. As you know by now, this allows the GPU to draw more power and thus in theory clock higher.

With that higher power draw though, we have our first official introduction of the 600W cooler from GIGABYTE. We previously saw this in the TITAN GHZ edition, but this was semi-official because this was not a cooler that was sanctioned by NVIDIA and thus could not be used on the TITAN Black Edition. GIGABYTE had cleverly shipped it with the graphics card however.

This time it has passed the NVIDIA green light program and with it we get the best air cooler on any GPU we've tested since. It's easy to say that and may not mean much at face value, but consider that even with the card overclocked (we are talking a scorching 1,516MHz on the core and 2,053MHz (8.2GHz QDR) on the memory), the GPU temperature never exceeded 59°C in any benchmark we ran. That makes it by far the coolest GPU we've tested and possibly matched only by the MSI GTX 750 Ti Gaming which is a significantly smaller GPU with performance that is orders of magnitude lower in many cases. GIGABYTE had made a big deal about their 600W cooler before, but on the GTX 980 it's very obvious just how efficient it is at keeping the graphics card cool.

As with the GTX 970, this supports the Flex display technology which allows you to use more displays simultaneously than any other GTX 980 on the market. The options



BENCHMARK RESULTS

3DMARK – Fire Strike: **12,515**

Catzilla – 1080p: **19,857**

Hitman: Absolution

(DX11 ultra detail) 4x AA: **71.8**

are virtually unlimited and you can have a multi 4K display video wall all powered from this single GPU.

More importantly though, is how this graphics card performs. Once again GIGABYTE has released the highest clocked GTX 980 on the market, with a real clock reaching 1,336MHz. Not once did our sample reduce this turbo frequency. The official number that it's supposed to reach is 1,329. The real clock isn't much higher than this but it does perhaps speak to the GPU Gauntlet sorting process that we keep hearing about. Naturally this made it the fastest graphics card out of the lot. Usually the GTX 980 will trade some blows with the outgoing GTX 780 Ti, especially the factory overclocked models. In this case, because of the massive factory overclock, the GIGABYTE GTX 980 manages to outpace any and all 780 Ti models. UHD resolution performance has improved in the last couple of months as well with successive driver updates, but it isn't quite where it should be yet. Do keep in mind that this affects all GTX 980 cards where AA is used. In the *Tomb Raider* testing for instance, there was an improvement where

this card was able to run the game with the highest settings possible, including 4x AA at 39fps. That is at the full 3840x2160 resolution. Without AA, the frame rate was much higher, well over the 50fps mark.

Overall, this is one powerful graphics card. There's no need for any overclocking here, if you do decide to do it however, there's plenty of legroom. As it stands, we are not likely to see a faster graphics card this year, at least one that is based on the GTX 980. GIGABYTE has once again produced a stellar graphics card with the G1 Gaming. **NAG**

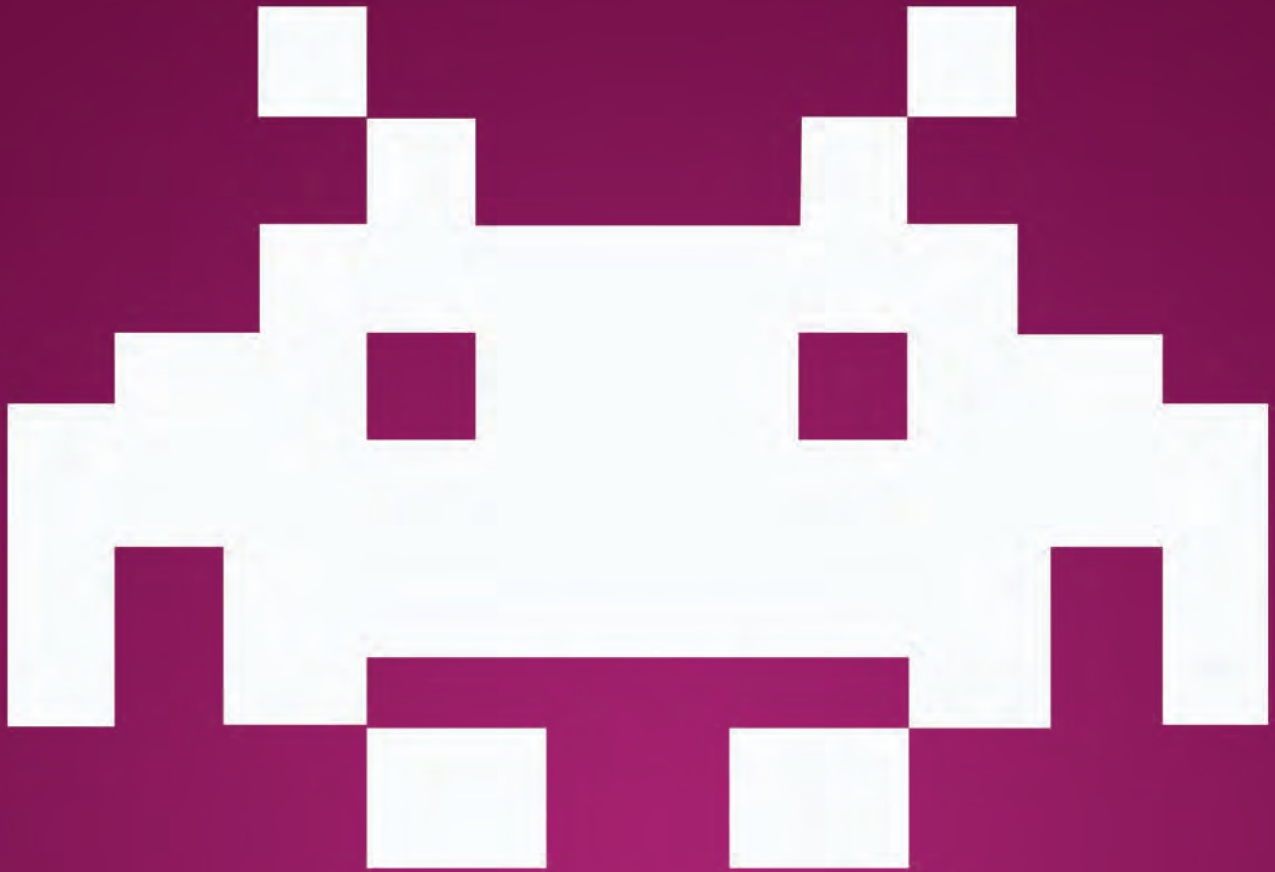
- Neo Sibeko

10

At present the GIGABYTE GTX 980 Gaming G1 is the fastest GPU on the market.

PLUS / 600W cooler / Fastest GTX 980 on the market / Flex display

MINUS / Steep pricing



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OPINIONS, FEATURES, PREVIEWS

Mionix NASH 20 headphones

Website / www.dcstore.co.za

ERP / R1,499 Supplier / DC Store

SPECS	FREQUENCY RESPONSE	20Hz – 20kHz
	MICROPHONE FREQUENCY RESPONSE	50Hz – 16kHz
	DRIVER UNITS	50mm
	IMPEDANCE	32 ohms

This unassuming set of stereo headphones isn't nearly as aesthetically ostentatious as most gaming headsets, but it packs a powerful sonic punch. I really like the simple, all-black look, but obviously if you expect your headsets to be covered in LEDs and chicken wire and steel bars and jet engines, maybe look elsewhere.

The NASH 20 is comfortable and lightweight, enough so that you'll hardly notice the set's on your head at all – which is really the best compliment I can give it. Ultra-soft padding lines the headband and ear cups, and the cups swivel freely to conform to the shape of your head. There's a no-frills approach followed throughout its rubber-coated design, and connecting the NASH to your PC is quickly done via 3.5mm jacks for stereo and mic – you'll not have to deal with any messy bundles of wires and in-line controls here.

On the rear of the left ear cup you'll find a volume dial, but no other controls adorn the unit. The stowaway microphone acts as its own mute button. Tuck the mic away and you'll hear a soft click letting you know that it's muted; lower it again and the same click will let you know that it's ready for use.

Audio produced by the NASH 20 is excellent. The set definitely leans towards the mid/high frequencies, but there's still ample bass as well. Volume levels are impressively high while remaining remarkably free of much distortion, and the cups are among the best I've tested at blocking out ambient audio. Bear in mind that because there's no in-line sound driver or any of those flashy magicks, your experience with the NASH 20 may differ depending on your sound card. **NAG**

- Dane Remendes



9

Mionix's Nash 20 is a wonderful headset. It's pleasantly comfortable and produces great audio.

PLUS / Excellent noise cancelling / Very comfortable / Great sound production

MINUS / Nothing

Piko

Website / www.maslow.co.za

ERP / R1,195 Supplier / Maslow

If you own a TV that's older than four years, chances are that it's on the dumb side of the "smart TV" scale. Android-based mini-PCs exist to put an end to that. Like its competitors, the Piko plugs right into your TV's HDMI port, and receives power from a USB or DC source. Everything you need to get going is included in the box: there's a remote control which can act as a wireless "air mouse" (similar to the Wii Remotes), a four-port USB hub, and all the necessary cables.

In action, the Piko performs well, breezing through the operating system and loading up full HD videos without a hitch. Tracking through videos and even playing games works a treat, as well. The Piko is clearly designed with online streaming in mind, though: we had a few issues with hot-swapping storage devices with the USB hub; the device needed to be restarted every time we changed up the hardware. Additionally, there's no Bluetooth support out-of-the-box. Should you wish to turn your Piko into a more capable Android gaming machine, you'll either need to get a Bluetooth adaptor or use a wired game controller. Additionally the remote features a gyroscope and so can be used with motion-controlled games.

Despite having a couple of hardware issues that might break this offering for you, if you intend to use the Piko for web browsing, video streaming or playing touch-based games (with the air mouse), then it's an excellent little device. **NAG**

- Geoff Burrows



8

Slightly flawed but otherwise very capable, the Piko is a great way to breathe new life into your ageing TV.

PLUS / Fully-inclusive bundle / Good performance / Easy setup / Full HD support

MINUS / No Bluetooth support / USB hot-swapping issues

Mionix NAOS 7000

Website / www.dcstore.co.za

ERP / R849 Supplier / DC Store

SPECS	SENSOR	Up to 7,000 DPI
	BUTTONS	7, programmable
	RESPONSE TIME	1ms
	REPORT RATE (USB)	Up to 1,000 reports per second

Supporting the same soft rubber coating as Mionix's NASH 20 headphones, the NAOS 7000 gaming mouse radiates quality. It's tastefully designed (but it's designed exclusively with right-handed people in mind – sorry lefties), with subtle customisable lighting and a sleek black aesthetic. Can it stand up to more popular high-end mouse brands like Logitech and Razer? It's tough to say, but Mionix has definitely produced a strong contender.

The software suite that powers the mouse can be daunting at first with the many different options squeezed into its UI, but you'll quickly find ways to fine tune every aspect of the NAOS – including the ability to customise its lift-off distance to your liking. You'll also find a nifty feature called the Surface Quality Analyzer Tool, used to measure the tracking capabilities of your chosen gaming surface.

My only real issue with the NAOS is that it's quite a bulky, wide mouse, which means that it leans substantially more towards palm-gripped players. In palm grip, the mouse is nicely contoured to accommodate all your fingers, while in claw grip your fingers might rest awkwardly depending on the shape and size of your hand. Its extreme width also means that the mouse tends to fishtail a bit during more pronounced sweeps of the hand – but thankfully this can be countered by toying with the software's more advanced features.

More so than with most gaming mice, your experience with the NAOS will be highly dependent on your personal preference and how your hand tends to rest during use. I don't imagine anyone will be disappointed with it though – it's an outstanding product.

NAG

- Dane Remendes



8

This is an excellent gaming mouse, particularly if you favour palm grip.

PLUS / Elegant design / Option-filled software

MINUS / Not the most comfortable for claw grip

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THE LAZY GAMER'S GUIDE

CloudGate Android PC

► Website / www.cloudgate.co.za ► RRP / R1,999

“**W**hat’s a CloudGate?” we hear you ask as you scratch your head, your brow twisted with confusion. Well, the simple answer is that it’s a PC! “But it’s not reeeeeaaaally a PC at all, is it?” Of course it is, you silly human. There’s none of them pesky Windowses or Linuxes or OS Xes involved, however. Instead, CloudGate is powered by Google’s Android operating system, leveraging the clout of the mountain of apps available on the Google Play Store to create a powerful, portable, yet affordable alternative to a notebook or desktop PC. That’s CloudGate, and it costs just R1,999. And no, you can’t really use it as a gaming PC, but it’s useful in so many other ways that this really shouldn’t bother you.





“The CloudGate Android PC is tiny, spanning 128mm in height and width, and standing just 20mm tall.”

HOW'S IT WORK?

All you need to get started with CloudGate is a monitor or TV with HDMI input, and a mouse and keyboard to interface with the device. It comes with all the necessary cables and power connectors.

BITE-SIZED COMPUTING

The CloudGate Android PC is tiny, spanning 128mm in height and width, and standing just 20mm tall. This makes it conveniently portable, and it won't take up much space on your desk or TV stand.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Having access to the Play Store ensures that there's a vast array of unlockable functionality just a few clicks away. Games, productivity suites, social media apps, web browsers and more can all be discovered by doing a bit of browsing. CloudGate turns any TV into a smart TV.

MEDIA ON THE GO

Plug in an external hard drive and your CloudGate PC turns into a portable media centre. Watch movies, listen to music and browse photos from the comfort of your couch.

WINDOWS, IN THE CLOUD

In case you absolutely must have access to Windows-exclusive functionality, CloudGate offers their proprietary CloudWare service, which is sort of like a virtual machine/not-quite-dumb terminal that lets you run Windows applications on a remote server. Sadly, this is perhaps the one area of the CloudGate that falters, because if the connection is slow, using CloudWare is painful.

WHERE WOULD I USE IT?

Well, wherever you'd like really. It's great for home or business use depending on your needs, and is very cost effective if you're on a tight budget. It'd be quite useful in schools as well.

SUMMARY

PROS

- Very useful in a variety of ways

CONS

- CloudWare highly dependent on the whims of the Internet

ALTERNATIVES

- Piko
- Rikomagic mini PC

TECHNICAL

CPU:

Quad Core 1.6Ghz processor

GPU:

Quad Core Mali 400

RAM:

2GB

STORAGE:

8GB built-in / expandable up to 32GB via SD card

OS:

Android 4.2

CONNECTIVITY:

- Wi-Fi 802.11b/g/n
- Bluetooth
- 1x HDMI
- 3x USB 2.0
- 1x micro USB
- 1x SD card slot
- 1x S/PDIF / 1x RJ45



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NAG EXTREME OVERCLOCKING AT RAGE 2014

During the weekend of rAge, myself (ShockG) and BelowZero overclocker dRweEz demoed two overclocked systems on the latest generation hardware at the NAG Extreme Overclocking booth.

dRweEz tackled the Z97 platform with the GIGABYTE Z97X SOC-LN2 board, Corsair Dominator Platinum 2933MHz memory along with the incredible AX1500i PSU. I took to the X99 platform using the GIGABYTE X99-SOC Force motherboard along with Corsair Vengeance LPX DDR4 2,800MHz memory and the Corsair AX1500i PSU.

The purpose for the weekend was simple. Show the robustness of the various hardware components, show some extreme overclocking to gamers and all expo visitors who may not be familiar with it, and finally to show how much fun extreme overclocking could be if you have some of the best hardware on the planet at your disposal. To that end we were fortunate enough to receive hardware support from our main sponsors Corsair and GIGABYTE, as well as their local distributor Rectron, who sponsored copious amounts of LN2 for us to use.

Of particular interest to many at the show, and for us as well, was the G-Power modified graphics card. The GIGABYTE G-Power is a separate PWM that has a custom programmable controller, a highly beefed up VRM and the ability to interface with just about every motherboard or graphics card ever made. This G-Power board, while not retail, is not an unfamiliar sight to many extreme and veteran overclockers. The G-Power board was connected to the GIGABYTE GTX970 Gaming G1 graphics card (we reviewed this graphics card in the October issue of NAG). What we essentially did was remove the already impressive VRM on that card and the familiar NCP 81174 that would interface with the GPU. The issue with this voltage controller was that it doesn't support custom voltage settings and certainly isn't configurable through software as it has no I2C bus support whatsoever. As such, our challenge prior to arriving at rAge was to not only give ourselves the needed control of the graphics card, but be able to provide enough power to it should we need it.

With the help of GIGABYTE's own in-house overclocking guru, HiCookie, we managed to not only beef up the graphics card's VRM through the G-Power, but we had explicit voltage control as well. With no limits as to what we could do as far as power was concerned we were just about ready to tackle the



HWBOT scores for the GTX 970.

Given that we did not modify the graphics card's memory controller (these are two separate chips on every modern day high-end graphics card) we would eventually need no less than seven PCI Express power connectors for the system excluding the one for the CPU. This is where we were very fortunate to have Corsair provide us with the world's best computer PSUs. This 1,500 watt PSU not only had the required PCI Express power connectors but had two to spare. During the entire weekend, the only time the fan on the PSU would spin up is when the system was starting, but not once during the entire overclocking session did it need active cooling. Even with the immense amount of power we were requiring from the PSU, it just wasn't enough for the PSU to break a sweat. If anything, that's part of what a titanium rating gets you on a high-end PSU.

With the system ready, we went about looking to see just how far we could take the GTX 970 in three highly competitive benchmarks. These benchmarks were 3DMark Fire Strike, Fire Strike Extreme and finally 3DMark 11. At the time, the highest scores for each of these were 12,425, 6,214 and 17,936 respectively. With all the hardware we had at our disposal and the

modifications that had been performed on it, beating these scores was a mere walk in the park as we managed to not only match these scores but beat them extensively to claim the fastest GTX 970 in the world (at least at the time) according to the benchmarks. Our final scores at the end of the weekend were 13,139 (up by 5.4%), 6,688 (up by 7%) and finally 19,945 in 3DMark 11 (an increase of 10%). There was plenty more in the system and there's no question that with focus and commitment we would have increased these numbers drastically. To put these numbers in context, a normal gaming machine with the respective graphics card, motherboard, CPU and memory would score around 10,000 in 3DMark Fire Strike, 5,000 in 3DMark Fire Strike Extreme and just under 16,000 points in 3DMark 11. So in each benchmark we were looking at improvements of around 25% over stock performance.

Interestingly enough, just a month after the event, Chinese overclocker DFORDOG managed to edge out these scores, but using the very same GIGABYTE G-Power board. This further proves that for the most competitive overclocking endeavours at the edge of technology, there aren't much better options than the GIGABYTE G-Power. This continued battle of the GTX 970s is sure to become even more intense. Between dRWeEz and I, I do believe that we will reclaim these top scores once again before year's end using the very same GIGABYTE and Corsair combo.

After a hiatus lasting a couple of years in competitive level overclocking, it was good to be back in the driver's seat in the company of dRWeEz and a live audience. It helped immensely that we had the right hardware to do this and even at the end of the weekend, not a single component was broken or suffered reduced functionality. If you ever believed extreme overclocking is dangerous, we are here to tell you

that it is not as we proved this over hours of repeated stress on the hardware throughout three days.

Coming to the expo we had almost no expectations for the hardware. While we were aware that it was good, if not great, it proved to be even better than we could have ever expected. We had virtually no issues and there was not a single time we could not start the systems even at the most extreme temperatures. We would like to encourage even more people to take part in overclocking, even if it's not at the extreme level. These days, as we demonstrated, hardware is so robust, that it can withstand very high stress levels without failure. The quality of the products may be hard to discern sometimes with so many brands. However, one gets to find out the limits when overclocking right at the very edge and this is where the difference between vendors is made evident. With all the supporters of the demo and the countless number of people that came around, we got to explain many things about overclocking and dispel many myths as well (nothing has ever exploded while we were overclocking).

Next year we hope to be back, with an even better show and perhaps even some participation from the crowd. As I've always believed, there can never be too many people involved in overclocking. We also managed to find an enthusiastic young gamer to assist us and for his help we gifted him a new Corsair K70 RGB keyboard. Of course this is a gaming peripheral but I'd like to think that he'll be navigating the BIOS/UEFI of a motherboard soon enough with it, clocking up a storm sometime in the future.

I would personally like to thank everyone who made this all possible. NAG, the event organisers, dRWeEz, and of course our sponsors GIGABYTE and Corsair. If you were ever in doubt about the quality of the hardware they produce, you can lay your fears to rest as they were more than confident in what their products could deliver. From the simplest of things such as the mouse right up to the motherboard, we had nothing short of the best setup in which to overclock. Until next time, happy overclocking to you all and have a great holiday!

- Neo Sibeko

NAG



NAG AT MSI'S MASTER OVERCLOCKING ARENA 2014

On the weekend of October the 17th, just a week after rAge 2014, MSI held their annual MOA (Master Overclocking Arena) competition. As with all the previous competitions, MOA featured over a dozen of the top overclockers from around the world.

These competitors had qualified over the course of several months in their respective regions. Unlike in previous competitions though, instead of having a single class of overclockers all using the same hardware, MSI broke it down to two classes. Entrants could only enter in a single class, but it did allow for those with lesser hardware in class B for instance to show their skill even with limited hardware. In this class there were no regional restrictions and all entrants competed around the world simultaneously leading up to the competition.

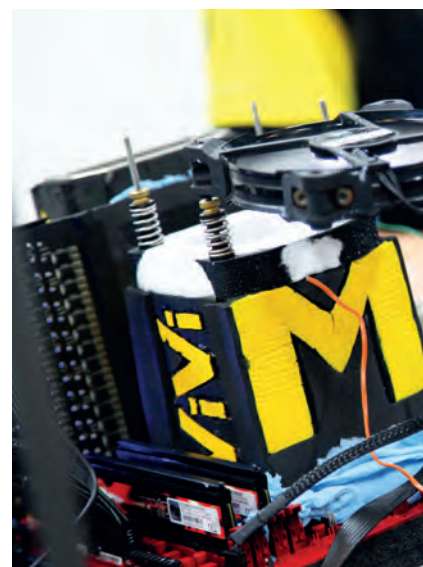
South Africa had two of our best overclockers qualify – ViVi and dRweEz. Both of these overclockers were at rAge a week prior, pushing hardware to its limits using some of the best hardware money can buy, and of course plenty of liquid nitrogen.

For the first time ever, MOA was streamed live on Twitch, hosted by none other than OC-TV, which has always been the go-to live overclocking broadcasting agency. As expected, the rules were set by MSI and HWBOT to ensure consistency with international overclocking standards. To that end, HWBOT manager Massman was present, not in the capacity of a judge, but instead one

of the commentators of the live broadcast. The two judges were top overclockers Ian (8-pack) from the UK and Roman (der8auer) from Germany. Two faces and names all competitors were very familiar with.

Last year MSI made the decision to make this a closed event and this year was the same with no spectators. Only the independent journalists, partners, competitors and of course MSI and its hosts were present at the venue. This obviously allows the overclockers to focus exclusively on the task at hand. However, it is a pity that it has made the event and exercise very niche. We do hope next year, should MSI host the competition, that it will perhaps be at a venue where gamers are present as well. After all, the similarities between competitive gaming and overclocking are more than skin deep and in structure these two activities are by and large very similar.

Where hardware is concerned, MSI had a very strong showing this year with not a single piece of hardware failing due to overclocking. As usual there is some hardware that, for some reason or another, exhibits odd behavior, like a particular SSD as used by the Russian overclocker Xtreme Addict. Super Pi



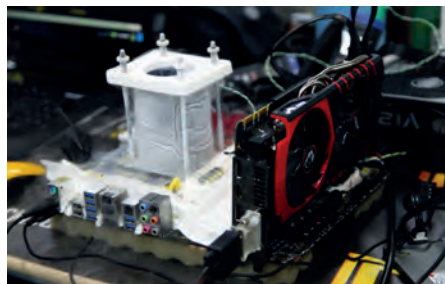


would not run successfully on this drive which obviously ended his day prematurely. This was the only hardware glitch that was encountered outside of regular extreme overclocking challenges. This was the first time that we've attended a live competition where the hardware held up for as long as it did and was without any failure as a result of the extreme conditions it was operated at. The involved vendors in the competition provided not only solid and reliable hardware, but ensured that each entrant had two sets of hardware, in case one component failed unexpectedly.

The hardware used for the competition was as follows: MSI's Z97 MPower motherboard, the Intel Core i7 4790K, Cooler Master's brilliant V1200 platinum (previous NAG Dream Machine PSU), and JETFLO 120mm fans. The memory of choice was G.Skill's TRIDENTX F3 CL10 2600. Kingston's HYPERX 3K SSDs and ViewSonic's VX2370SMH LED monitors along with keyboards and mice by SteelSeries completed the hardware list. The graphics cards were the sublime MSI GTX



"WITH THREE CATEGORIES AND ONLY TWO HOURS FOR EACH, THE PRESSURE WAS ON FOR EVERY CONTESTANT."



980 GAMING and the very rare, but peerless GeForce GTX 780 Ti Lightning. During the competition only the 780 Ti Lightning could be used for the 3D benchmark, but after the competition ended and on the following day, the GTX 980 was allowed as well. Throughout the weekend MSI managed to secure over a dozen top score results with their hardware (previously known as "world records"). Not surprising given that many of the world's prolific overclockers were competing at the event.



With three categories and only two hours for each, the pressure was on for every contestant. Given that many of the competitors had never even used some of the hardware prior to arriving at the competition, it would be a test of who could best prepare and dial in the settings the quickest. Experience would play a major role here and it is perhaps one of the reasons why ViVi ended up taking first place. Familiarity with this kind of competition helped immensely as he knew that he did not have to win every round, but do pretty well in all three. This was very evident during the 3DMark Fire Strike round as he posted one of the first set of scores and with it coincidentally, he would go on to win the competition. Obviously at the time others were trying to beat this score, but it would not happen and at the end of the grueling day he



stood triumphant. oc_windforce, the Korean overclocker, usually teamed up with little_boy at various competitions, had a fantastic start. He won the Super Pi 32M round. From there his position in the top three was pretty much guaranteed unless something went drastically wrong. Given his consistent performance and perhaps even bias to graphics card benchmarks, he was always going to do well. In Cinebench, dRWeEz managed to place second, displacing ViVi from the number two spot, just below Moose83 the German overclocker. However, due to the poor quality of his first CPU sample during the Super Pi round, he had placed near the bottom of the list. At 6.2GHz, not much was going to happen in such a CPU dependent benchmark.

That had pretty much eliminated his chances of claiming victory, but it did prove that with the right hardware, he remains capable of impressive results that match his previous records with all sorts of hardware.

In the end it was ViVi who walked off with \$3,000 in cash and hardware to the value of \$2,000 (he would also claim an additional

\$500 on the following day in the "No-limits battle"). A close second went to Tolsty from the Ukraine who received \$2,000, third place was oc_windforce from Korea with \$1,500 and fourth place went to Moose83 from Germany earning himself \$1,000. Like ViVi, these individuals walked away with over \$2,000 worth of hardware in addition to their prize money.

Since 2008, MSI has been hosting this competition and with each successive event, the input from overclockers has been injected into their retail products. Many of the wonderful hardware that MSI has been producing in the last two to three years has been a direct result of this close collaboration between the overclocking community, its own internal overclockers and the engineers within the firm. As it is, the battle for component supremacy is no longer a two horse race, but MSI is right in there, with a valid claim to producing the most robust components and products in the market.

Separate from the overclocking action, MSI also displayed several other motherboards

"SINCE 2008, MSI HAS BEEN HOSTING THIS COMPETITION AND WITH EACH SUCCESSIVE EVENT, THE INPUT FROM OVERCLOCKERS HAS BEEN INJECTED INTO THEIR RETAIL PRODUCTS."

from their gaming range including the previously reviewed MSI GTX 980 GAMING. Word was that there wouldn't be a Lightning version of this card for overclockers specifically, but given just how adept the GAMING GTX 980 is already at overclocking, we can fully appreciate why such a product may not come to be.

Overall this was a successful competition, with the usual faces and plenty of new faces coming to the show. For instance, veteran and previous winner of the MOA, Lucky_n00b from Indonesia was present, covering the event in the capacity of a journalist but also giving some useful tips to his understudies that had come to represent the Indonesian overclocking community.

Every year, overclockers, amateurs and professionals alike have come to anticipate MSI's MOA as the single largest overclocking competition in the calendar year. This is viewed as not only an opportunity for competitors to come together, but also a time where new faces to the scene may be introduced. Once you win a live overclocking competition, especially MOA, your status within the community is immortalised. MSI has been doing a stellar job since the beginning in not only promoting overclocking to every enthusiast, but to gamers as well. With each successive generation of gaming hardware, many of their overclocking features make their way on to their gaming boards. One could even argue that courtesy of these components, getting into overclocking has never been easier. What was previously a ridiculously small community and hobby has transformed how products are designed and what end users can expect from them.

We hope to return in 2015 again to see what MSI has prepared. Whatever it may be, it's guaranteed to be even more exciting. **NAG**

-Neo Sibeko



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Canon

MOSH *pit*

THE ESSENTIAL NAG HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE FOR GAMERS.

As gamers, we understand how difficult it can be to buy gifts for our kind. There are so many very expensive things to buy that navigating this minefield of a season can be a tricky and potentially costly affair. Well fear not, confused person: NAG is here to save the day!

We've gathered together a whole bunch (30 to be exact) of stuff that would normally go into our regular Mosh Pit pages and super-sized the whole shebang. Use this guide in two ways: if you're looking to buy a gift for a gamer, read through this feature and then drop subtle probing questions like "isn't *Final Fantasy* just the best?" and "don't you wish that you had a small remote-controlled drone?" and make a purchase decision based on their reactions. If you're the gamer in this situation, simply circle everything you want in this guide and "accidentally" leave the magazine lying around. Wistful scribbles like "wow, I want this thing so much!" are optional, but encouraged. Or, you can take a picture of the gift you really want and WhatsApp it to your partner along with a suitably loving message like "hey babe, you know I love you more than I love playing games, but I might love you even more if you buy me this <3".

» THE LEGACY COLLECTION: MAGIC: THE GATHERING – AJANI GOLDMANE & CHANDRA NALAAR

- » Supplier / Cosmic Comics
- » Website / www.cosmiccomics.co.za
- » RRP / R469 (each)

Take your obsession with the MTG gaming franchise to levels only spoken of in hushed tones deep inside psychiatric hospitals. Chandra comes with an actual fireball and Ajani, a sword and double axe. Both are well detailed (especially Ajani) and feature some good looking "material" bits that can flap and bend, but not swish because they're rigid. Not a bad choice for the person who feels the need to bring the cards to life in his or her bedroom.





JOKER MASK AND COMIC

- Supplier / Cosmic Comics
- Website / www.cosmiccomics.co.za
- RRP / R499

Terrify the locals and catch up on one of the most intense *Batman* story arcs since *The Killing Joke*. *Death of the Family* is as dark as it gets for Bats and his life-long nemesis The Joker, and what better way to commemorate this than with a book and mask set?

True story: we took this mask on a Halloween camping trip. When combined with pitch darkness broken only by an oil lantern, it made for a delightfully spooky experience. There's nothing like the shrieks of camping children. Trick or treat *that*, you little rascals.

ULTRO-PRO PORTABLE GAMING CASE

- Supplier / Heroes of Games and Comics
- Website / www.heroesofgc.com
- RRP / R420

An all-in-one safe storage solution for your collectible card games comes in the form of this zippered nylon shoulder bag. It has extra pockets to hold rule books and pamphlets as well as six individual compartments with Deck Protector sleeves for your gaming cards.



OUTDOOR TECH TURTLE SHELL 2.0 BLUETOOTH SPEAKER

- Supplier / Wintec Solutions
- Website / wintecsolutions.co.za
- RRP / R1,800

Designed for anyone looking for a robust portable speaker system that'll easily pair with any of your Bluetooth-enabled devices, the funky-looking Turtle Shell 2.0 is shock, water and dust resistant. Two-built in speakers are enhanced by omnidirectional audio design, and you'll find three multifunctional buttons on the side of the Turtle Shell that let you adjust volume, skip tracks and more. A nice touch is the built-in microphone, so you can do hands-free calls (especially useful if you clip the device onto, say, your bicycle). Expect to get around 16 hours of use off of a single battery charge.



FINAL FANTASY XIII TRADING ARTS VOL. 1

- Supplier / Heroes of Games and Comics
- Website / www.heroesofgc.com
- RRP / R750

These four characters might be small (about 10-15cm each), but they don't lack in detail. Since they're statues, not action figures, their poses are fixed, but each represents their character's attitude or fighting style perfectly. An easy buy for anyone who loves *Final Fantasy XIII*.

FINAL FANTASY CREATURES KAI VOL. 5

- Supplier / Heroes of Games and Comics
- Website / www.heroesofgc.com
- RRP / R850

Yes we might have a small obsession with *Final Fantasy*, but we couldn't *not* include this kick-ass set of five mini-statues when it landed in our office. Included in the box is Bahamut Zero from *FF Type-0*, Shiva, Bomb and Alexander from *FF VIII*, and Kefka Palazzo from *FF VI*. Just the fact that Kefka is included in this set is enough for any old-school *Final Fantasy* fan to break down in sweet tears of nostalgia, so go ahead and lighten your wallet for the sake of that evil bastard.



DC COMICS: THE NEW 52: SWAMP THING DELUXE ACTION FIGURE

- Supplier / Heroes of Games and Comics
- Website / www.heroesofgc.com
- RRP / R650

DC's New 52 series is awesome. You've probably read that a hundred times already in NAG over the last year or so. Whatever, we love it. The same applies to the new *Swamp Thing* series, which is dark and weird and super interesting. This figure represents all of those things, and has wings. That rhymes, which means it's obviously true.

This large action figure includes a shield and weapon/blade/sword thing that the king of the swamps can wield. 100% guaranteed to act as a conversation-starter for anyone who's impressed by action figures with wings (which is *everyone*).





▶ MARVEL SELECT ANTI-VENOM

- ▶ Supplier / Cosmic Comics
- ▶ Website / www.cosmiccomics.co.za
- ▶ RRP / R349

The story of this character is pretty involved: Eddie Brock, a symbiotic alien, a mysterious character and Spider-Man are all involved in different ways. But if you're buying this then you probably know all about that. This is a somewhat niche character but definitely looks the part and stands around 20cm tall. His arms, legs and head all articulate and the package ships with a snappy (read deluxe) three piece base (some assembly required). Warning: this Anti-Venom figurine has some of the sharpest edges we've ever seen on a figurine, so only give it to small children you don't like. It's a great gift from a grandparent or similar, provided your mom or dad got the Spider-Man to fight him.

▶ PLANTS VS. ZOMBIES: GARDEN WARFARE – ALL-STAR ZOMBIE & SHADOW FLOWER

- ▶ Supplier / Cosmic Comics
- ▶ Website / www.cosmiccomics.co.za
- ▶ RRP / R329

Almost everyone loves *Plants vs. Zombies*, and the new *Garden Warfare* spin-off sees players taking on the zombies while doing a little gardening. This action figure set includes a Shadow Flower and the All-Star Zombie (complete with his football gun). Limited articulation and an overly heavy gun make standing the zombie up on his own impossible, so boo to that. The set isn't bad for what you're paying but could have spent a little more time in the design phase. Oh, download codes are also included for some customisation items and card packs.



▶ DOMINION

- ▶ Supplier / Blowfish Entertainment
- ▶ Website / www.unplugyourself.co.za
- ▶ RRP / R594,95

Ascension is part board game, part deck-building game – which comes as no surprise considering that it was co-designed by a number of pro *Magic: The Gathering* players. This fast-paced game sees players taking turns to recruit Heroes and Constructs (granting various bonuses in the process) to fight for their cause and vanquish Monster cards. Killing Monsters gets you Honour Tokens (alongside other rewards), and once these tokens are depleted the player with the highest Honour wins. *Rise of Vigil* is a standalone expansion to the game, playable by 1-4 players (or 6 when combined with other *Ascension* products). It comes with new cards, new strategies, a game board and full-colour rulebook.





➤ MICRO DRONE 2.0

- Supplier / Build Volume
- Website / www.buildvolume.co.za
- RRP / R999

When we saw these little gadgets whizzing and whirring above the heads of visitors at rAge 2014, we were awestruck. We've had some experience with the bigger Parrot Drones and the like, but the Micro Drone 2.0 is just too cute to pass up. Included in the box is a full-size remote control that allows you to change flight and stick modes so you don't crash it into the walls too often. Takes some practice but once you've got it down, you'll love it.

➤ MAELSTROM 240 LIQUID CPU COOLER

- Supplier / Rebel Tech
- Website / www.rebeltech.co.za
- RRP / R1,129

Computer processors get really hot if you get too clever with overclocking. Or not clever enough, as it often goes. If you or someone you love is suffering from this dreadful addiction, then ease their pain with the gift of liquid cooling. It'll fit onto almost any modern CPU and its dual radiator design ensures that maximum cooling is achieved with minimum noise.



➤ LAN BAG

- Supplier / Gamers Gadgets
- Website / www.gamersgadgets.com
- RRP / R750

It's a LAN bag, used to conveniently carry your PC with you wherever you choose to take it. It has straps and clips and pockets and various features! It's also very sturdy, which is important when you're lugging around your expensive gaming equipment. It can handle up to 35 kilograms of weight, and is compatible with mid-tower ATX and full-size tower cases. Strap colour options are red, green or blue.

➤ ORB XBOX ONE CONTROLLER CHARGE DOCK

- Supplier / Megarom
- Website / www.megarom.co.za
- RRP / R399

Say no to down-time and pretend that you're saving the world at the same time! This gadget gives you the power to charge up to two replacement Xbox One batteries at a time, which are included in the box. Also included is a USB cable to power the unit: no additional external power is required.



▶ PLAYVIEW 3D PROJECTOR

- ▶ Supplier / Playview
- ▶ Website / www.playview.co.za
- ▶ RRP / R6,999

The price might put it out of the reach of most holiday gift-buyers, but there's nothing stopping you from blowing your 13th cheque on this neat little piece of technology. And "little" isn't an understatement: this thing is tiny. It's not full HD but its maximum resolution of 1280x800 puts it just above the 720p standard, which means it'll work perfectly for films, and it'll be absolutely fine for most console games. And with two included active 3D shutter glasses, you're ready to roll with one other person almost as soon as the box is unpacked.



▶ POWERTRAVELLER MINIGORILLA

- ▶ Supplier / Wintec Solutions
- ▶ Website / wintecsolutions.co.za
- ▶ RRP / R1,800

The minigorilla is a ruggedly-designed portable charger that'll keep all your mobile devices juiced and ready to go no matter how deep in the middle of nowhere you may find yourself. It comes with a sturdy travel case and adaptors to suit a range of devices – everything from netbooks to mobile phones to GPSes and beyond. The minigorilla is handily compatible with the solargorilla solar-powered charger. Perfect for those painfully long layover times at the airport, or when you're on your way to your family's favourite holiday destination (Uitenhage, obviously) and you forgot to charge your phone before leaving home, or for when you're doing a wilderness survival weekend but don't want to miss those all-important Facebook updates.



▶ SADES SNUK

- ▶ Supplier / Gamers Gadgets
- ▶ Website / www.gamersgadgets.com
- ▶ RRP / R560

Hearing is wonderful. Games make lots of pretty sounds very often and it's usually a good idea to know what those sounds are. ("We're under attack!", "reload!", and the footsteps of that guy sneaking up behind you are good examples of such sounds). However, if you're the sort of person who enjoys good quality audio without spending an arm, leg and a year's servitude of your first-born, then the Sades Snuk is a good place to start.



STEELSERIES RIVAL OPTICAL MOUSE

- Supplier / Megarom
- Website / www.megarom.co.za
- RRP / R759

Excellent performance for a decent price makes the Rival a solid contender for a place in your gaming rig. Features include a 6,500 cpi sensor, 1ms response time and support for up to 50Gs of force. That's nearly six times the maximum force that a US Air Force pilot can expect to encounter while strafing an enemy position. Now you know!



ORB CAMERA TV CLIP & WALL MOUNT

- Supplier / Megarom
- Website / www.megarom.co.za
- RRP / R199

What happens when your PlayStation 4 camera doesn't include a means to attach it to the top of your TV or wall, but you want that functionality? You buy this, of course! Designed to enhance your gaming experience through the power of convenience and correct placement of your camera, this mount can be attached to your TV or wall for maximum usefulness.



SKROSS WORLD ADAPTER MUV USB

- Supplier / Wintec Solutions
- Website / wintecsolutions.co.za
- RRP / R500

Anyone who's travelled outside of South Africa knows that any time you leave the country there's a significant chance you won't be able to use any of your power-hungry gadgets thanks to the many different plug socket standards used across the world. The aptly-named World Adapter takes care of this issue so you can use your existing power connectors in more than 150 countries. There's a nifty slider system which lets you select the appropriate input, and the two built-in USB ports can be used to simultaneously charge two mobile devices.

▶ DELUX DLS-X501 2.1 SPEAKERS

- ▶ Supplier / Crown Hyper World
- ▶ Website / crownhyperworld.co.za
- ▶ RRP / R199

Delux might not be the most sought-after brand in the gaming world, but they sure do know how to cater to people on the tightest of budgets. This 2.1 speaker set pumps out the sort of audio you'd expect (the small satellites are rated at just 2W each, while the subwoofer is 6W), but they're the perfect gift for any young'uns in your life who've been begging you for their own speaker set. They can be connected to any device with a 3.5mm input, and the set's build quality is decent.



▶ MARVEL STRING DOLLS

- ▶ Supplier / Heroes of Games and Comics
- ▶ Website / www.heroesofgc.com
- ▶ RRP / R60 each

We're pretty sure that these are both the first and the only licensed comic book characters made entirely from string. They might look a bit awkward but their Raggedy Ann appearance lends them a certain charm that could take your fancy. As an added bonus, they can be dismantled and used in emergency situations that call for brightly coloured string, like being stranded on an island with a kitten, or if a giant asks you for dental floss.

▶ POP! MARVEL: GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY – ROCKET RACCOON VINYL BOBBLE-HEAD FIGURE

- ▶ Supplier / Cosmic Comics
- ▶ Website / www.cosmiccomics.co.za
- ▶ RRP / R199

The only reason we're looking at Bobble-heads again, even though we said we never would, is because it's all about *Guardians of the Galaxy*. Rocket Raccoon, Star-Lord, Groot and Drax are all available. Go on, fill a stocking with one.



STAR REALMS

- Supplier / Boardgames.co.za
- Website / www.boardgames.co.za
- RRP / R199 (starter), R69 (expansion)

Star Realms was developed by two *Magic: The Gathering* pro players, one of whom is also the co-creator of the game *Ascension*, so you know there's a strong pedigree and loads of experience behind this game.

Much like *MtG*, *Star Realms* is a game in which players battle against one another using decks of cards which have been built from traded and bought cards. The starter box gives you enough cards for two players to get going, and expansion packs are available to add extra oomph to your game.



SCRIBBLENAUTS UNMASKED: A DC COMICS ADVENTURE — BLIND-BOXED LINE SERIES 3

- Supplier / Cosmic Comics
- Website / www.cosmiccomics.co.za
- RRP / R90

In the box we opened was Reverse Flash or Professor Zoom. The blind-box concept is fun – unless you end up with 18 of the same one you don't like. Give a little mystery this holiday season and prepare for some trading.



BANANAGRAMS

- Supplier / Boardgames.co.za
- Website / www.boardgames.co.za
- RRP / R199

Banana stuff is always fun: banana milkshakes, banana outfits, even banana-based animations. We have a small obsession with these potassium-laden fruits, and so will readily endorse anything that has anything to do with them. *Bananagrams* is sort of like *Scrabble*, but different enough to avoid any licensing issues with Hasbro. Either way: good family fun.

➤ MARVEL DEADPOOL KEYRING

- Supplier / Cosmic Comics
- Website / www.cosmiccomics.co.za
- RRP / R50

So it's a Deadpool keyring for your car/house/boat/cabin/dungeon keys. Of course if you're planning on marrying a girl or boy soon that is Deadpool crazy then you could always hand this over as a wedding proposal and it'll go down just fine.



➤ NAG GAMING MOUSE PAD

- Supplier / NAG Merchandise Shoppe
- Website / www.nag.co.za/store
- RRP / R210

A 370mmx270mm gaming mouse mat that will turn your gaming skills from crap to cool, from poor to perfect, from useless to useful! Okay, maybe not, but at least you'll have a pretty picture to look at under your mouse.

➤ JOKER SUPER DEFORMED PLUSH

- Supplier / Heroes of Games and Comics
- Website / www.heroesofgc.com
- RRP / R185

The Super-Deformed range of plushies comes in Joker (which is the one we have here) Robin or Harley-Quinn. They love to be cuddled.



➤ HEAD PHONE STAND

- Supplier / Gamers Gadgets
- Website / www.gamersgadgets.com
- RRP / R280

We bought one of these at rAge and every time someone sees it on our desk we hear "oooh that's so cool!". It does exactly what it's called – it's a wooden stand to put your headphones on when you aren't using them. It stands 23.5cm high and comes in either dark brown or light oak.

GG

by Tarryn van der Byl

Tarryn has never received any form of education ever in her life. She was officially classified as feral but lucky for her she was adopted by a troop of surprisingly smart lemurs. She sometimes visits the zoo to see "mom" and "dad".



COMING UP AFTER THE BREAK

Deck the halls, batten down the hatches, and assume the brace position – it's the holiday season, and I'm already mixing my metaphors. Or mixing my festive punch. I forgot which one I did first, but I haven't forgotten that, this time last year, I predicted that a new *Unreal Tournament* game would be announced in 2013. I wasn't wrong.

BEHOLD, MY PRETERNATURAL POWERS OF PROGNOSTICATION, AS I GAZE LONG INTO THE FUTURE, AND THE FUTURE GAZES BACK INTO ME, AND IT'S KIND OF TICKLISH AND SMELLS A BIT LIKE FISH. Hang on a moment, that's actually one of my cats.

According to my mystical spirit guide who is, um, totally not a cat, though...

A GAME WILL BE ANNOUNCED

I mean, it's obvious I'm some sort of time-space wizard who controls what games are going to be announced, so I have to choose this one carefully. A new *Space Quest*? Oh, the Two Guys From Andromeda are already working on *SpaceVenture*. What about an *Aliens: Colonial Marines* sequel? Ha, I just put that in as a joke. *Half-Life 3*? No, I don't want to mess with Valve's time-space wizards – they're, like, eight levels up on me and they've unlocked the "Trololol" perk.

Alan Wake 2. Yes. With *Quantum Break*

scheduled to drop sometime in the first half of 2015, it's almost like E3 in June is conveniently timed to coincide with the announcement of *Alan Wake 2*. Almost too conveniently.

Bonus prediction! *Quantum Break* will be delayed until the first half of 2016, precluding the announcement of *Alan Wake 2*. NOOOOO!

VIRTUAL REALITY IS NOT THE NEXT BIG THING

It wasn't in 1995 when Nintendo launched the Virtual Boy, and it won't be 20 years later in 2015 for the same reason – vomit.

The Oculus Rift is also too expensive, and besides, who wants to spend that much cash on something that makes you look that stupid, just so you can pretend you're in a room with doors and walls and sharks and stuff? Exactly. Until virtual reality projection is built into contact lenses, it's only ever going to have limited mass market potential – and in the meantime, codeine cough syrup is a much cheaper alternative with more or less the same result.

Bonus prediction! At least five more virtual reality devices will be revealed by major tech manufacturers during the year. None of them will be contact lenses, and at least one of them will be something preposterously impractical, like

a multi-directional treadmill that simulates movement. Wait, no, the Virtuix Omni already exists. You know, this is probably how *Wall-E* started. I'm not sure how we've managed to get this far as a species, but I don't expect we'll get much further.

EVERYBODY FORGETS #GAMERGATE EVER HAPPENED

Okay, so it's more like a wish than a prediction, but – just between us – so was that *Unreal Tournament* announcement thing, and that worked out.

Bonus prediction! People realise that increased diversity in games is not the apocalypse. Same as above. That increased diversity in games is even a matter of controversy, though, might be a compelling reason for an apocalypse.

I'M CHANGING MY RELATIONSHIP STATUS

The cats need a more secure home environment, so we're getting married. Not me and the cats, me and my fiancé – but if you'd asked me three years ago, I might've predicted the cats. I didn't, though, so it doesn't count. **NAG**

EXTRA LIFE

By Scott Johnson / ©2014 All rights reserved / myextralife.com



The Graphite Series, Evolved.

Graphite Series computer cases meet at the intersection of performance engineering and forward design: eye-catching shapes, materials that stimulate the senses, and state-of-the-art usability.



The mobile Mini-ITX case that's built for speed.

The Graphite Series 380T packs a powerful punch in a portable Mini-ITX PC case. A built-in carrying handle makes transport a breeze. It's easy to build the road-ready computer of your dreams within a spacious, easy to access interior with room for an extra-long graphics card. You can keep things cool with mounts for up to five fans and a convenient front panel three-speed fan controller.

Premium looks, premium space, premium cooling.

The stunning Graphite Series 780T Full-Tower PC case can satisfy the most hardcore gamer or overclocker with ample room for nine drives and nearly a dozen large cooling fans. Into water cooling? You'll appreciate the generous space for dual 360mm radiators. And, you'll get everything done faster: the 780T offers easy maintenance shortcuts like tool-free removal of side panels, hard drives, and graphics cards. A three-speed fan control button and generous options for peripheral connections make the front-panel a true time saver.

Alienware recommends Windows.

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